

DISCOVERING THE GIFT OF GOD: THE IMPACT OF AMERICAN
WORLDVIEW ON SALVATION BY GRACE

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In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Missiology

by
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The Impact of American Worldview on Salvation by Grace


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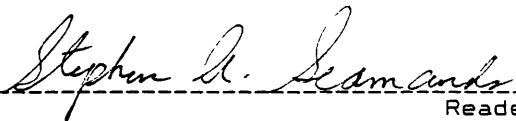
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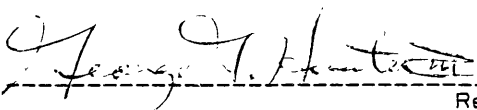
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Dedication

To the people in my life, who, by their own brokenness, remind me of my own:

To Junior and Tyree, two friends whose lives have been made nearly intolerable by debilitating paralysis. One day they will discover that their suffering is redemptive.

To the memory of a twelve-year-old friend who died of a brain tumor some time ago:

I shall always remember you, Kara Beth.
Even when I am old and grey,
I shall not forget,
That in those moments when I was present
to you,
I was nearest to eternity.

To George, a man in his forties or fifties, who is still child-like in mind. Whenever he attends church he comes to the altar during the closing hymn and beckons to me to come and pray with him--a living reminder of what we all would like to be--humble, and hungry for God.

To my wife, Carolyn, and my daughters Cara, Christie, and Cammie. While we are not visibly broken, we share in our family an intimate knowledge of one another that provides community for our inner brokenness.

And to the memory of my father, Leo Fred Satter, whose philosophy of life--a kind of sacred foolishness--I have always admired. His life was filled with grace more than any other I have known.

DISCOVERING THE GIFT OF GOD:

The Impact of American Worldview on Salvation by Grace

Ralph Gerald Satter, E. Stanley Jones School of World Mission and Evangelism, Asbury Theological Seminary, Doctor of Missiology 1991. Dr. Darrell L. Whiteman, mentor

ABSTRACT

Self-reliant individualism is a dominant theme in the American worldview. This dissertation is a study of the influence of individualism on the North American understanding of salvation by grace. The thesis is that American individualism negatively influences Americans' understanding of salvation by grace.

A key biblical understanding of salvation by grace is Paul's use of justification by faith as a social as well as an individual reality--not exclusively an individual reality as commonly understood today. Krister Stendahl's work reveals that Paul employed the doctrine as a means of uniting Jewish and Gentile Christians. This same biblical insight enables people today to experience grace in socially diverse community groups.

The dissertation includes an analysis of the relationship between American individualism and the American church. While missiologists perceive American individualism as an enemy of the gospel, since its present form is primarily a product of the Enlightenment, Robert Bellah and others have shown that the church actually contributes to individualism in American Christians.

The thesis of the dissertation was tested in a field research project which used a pre-test post-test measure of the effect of a community-building Bible study designed by Lyman Coleman on the participants' understanding of salvation by grace. Grace scores were obtained using measures developed by Strommen and reported in his Five Cries of Youth. The results confirmed the hypothesis that individualism negatively influences the understanding of salvation by grace and that when Americans experience a strong sense of community it lowers the dominance of individualism in their worldview and increases their understanding of salvation as a gift of God instead of the result of human effort.

Recommendations which derive from the research include the preaching of grace without moralism, the communication of grace by the corporate witness of the Christian community, and the recovery of mystery through focusing on the presence of Christ in worship.

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With warm appreciation and affection I thank the people of my congregations for encouraging me and supporting me while I divided my time between being their pastor and being a student. I will always be indebted to them for their generosity and their love.

Finally, thanks to those who participated in the experiment. This dissertation is theirs as well as mine.

CHAPTER 1

Whatever Became of Grace?

I have for some time been captivated by the message of salvation by grace. I was brought up in an evangelical church, and for some reason understood salvation in terms of human effort all my young life. It was not until I was in my third year of theological training at a seminary in the Midwest that the first realizations of salvation by grace entered my mind and brought music to my soul. Although I had committed my life to Christ many times, my life as a Christian really began during a time when I was taking a class on John Wesley's theology. One day when I was struggling in prayer, a thought entered my mind, "Look away from yourself to the cross of Christ. There is your hope."

Years later, as a young pastor, I looked down into the crib of my first-born child. The words entered my mind, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son."¹ Feeling that my love for my daughter was infinite, I became overwhelmed by a love for me so great that the Father would sacrifice his Son. About that same time, I heard Dr. Frank Carver lecture on his experience of God's love. He told a group of ministers that it was not until after he had pastored for years, earned a Ph.D. degree, and taught theology and Greek in college for some time that he began to discover that God loved him. Through these experiences I

gained a great appreciation for the grace and love of God. I also began to wonder why Dr. Carver and I were so slow to discover the truth of God's grace, even after years of theological training and ministry. After all, salvation by grace, or justification by faith in Jesus Christ, is the cardinal doctrine of Protestantism. How had we missed the obvious?

Later, while pastoring a blue-collar church, I became frustrated at the congregation's desire for guilt-inducing messages. It seemed like personal commitment or the lack of it was the only religious issue that counted to them. About this time I imagined that God spoke to me again. I saw myself standing beside a high mountain lake in the Sierra Nevada mountains of California. I looked at the rugged mountains, the tall pines, and the clear water. He stood behind me and we looked at the scenery together for awhile. Then he said, "Its beautiful, isn't it?"

"Very," I replied.

"Do you know, of all the beauty I enjoy right now, the thing that delights me the most is you."

After an encounter like that, I did not feel messages which emphasized more human effort were appropriate. I began to preach sermons which stressed what God has done for us in Jesus Christ, and I reminded the people that God was pre-disposed to love them regardless of their behavior or commitment. And I wondered why my preaching was met with

empty stares. My congregation seemed to be just as slow to discover the gift of God in salvation by grace as Dr. Carver and I had been. Why was salvation by grace such a slippery concept, so readily transformed into human-effort salvation? Even my own grasp of the concept was tentative, since I caught myself repeatedly reverting back to old ways of thinking, trying again to become my own savior.

Eventually my questions led me to the E. Stanley Jones School of World Mission and Evangelism at Asbury Theological Seminary, where I was exposed to the concept of culture. I learned that culture shapes one's view of reality; knowledge and experience are culturally conditioned. I began to apply the concept of culture to my old questions. What part had culture played in my experience of salvation? Was there something about American culture that made salvation by grace difficult to grasp? Had my congregation been culturally conditioned to interpret Christianity in terms of human effort? Why does grace appear to be so incomprehensible to North Americans?

This study is an exploration into these questions.

The Statement of the Problem

Individualism is an American worldview theme (Hsu 1972, Spindler and Spindler 1983, Dyrness 1989). Nevertheless, many people are finding grace and power in a community

experience (Alcoholics Anonymous 1939, Klaas 1982). This study therefore attempts to answer the question, "Does individualism inhibit North Americans' understanding of salvation by grace?" The field research will measure the effect of participation in a Christian community group on each participant's individualism and their understanding of salvation by grace.

Definition of Terms

1. Community--two or more Christian believers whose relationship is characterized by confession, forgiveness, acceptance, love, encouragement, accountability, worship, and prayer. In this study "community" is narrowly defined as that fellowship and sense of acceptance and belonging that occurs within a small group of the church, in contrast to the larger church body and the pulpit-to-pew relationship.

2. Salvation--"The saving of man from the power and effects of sin" (White 1984:967). The biblical concept of salvation has various aspects: religious, emotional, practical, ethical, personal, and social (White 1984:968). However, in this study the term will be used, for measurement, to denote an individual's belief that he or she has a right relationship with God.

3. Grace--a term with many connotations and nuances. Wesleyan theology distinguishes between prevenient grace, justifying grace, and sanctifying grace (Wesley

1872:Vol.VI,509). The focus of this study is on justifying grace. Grace is most often defined as the unmerited favor of God. In this study, "by grace" is defined as "by God." That is, salvation by grace is used to denote that salvation which is God's action for and in the individual person as contrasted to salvation understood as the result of human effort.

Research Design and Methodology

This study utilizes library research and theological reflection. In addition, a single subject research design has been employed to gather empirical evidence to test the hypotheses. This is a quasi-experimental design, often used in religious settings. Spilka, Hood, and Gorsuch write,

There is . . . another set of procedures known as quasi-experimental designs. . . . These are to be employed when one cannot randomly assign people to research groups or fully exercise control as is usually true of research on religion, particularly when such research is undertaken in naturalistic settings. (1985:323)

While full experimental control is lacking in quasi-experimental designs, Campbell and Stanley (1963:34) point out that, from the standpoint of the final interpretation of an experiment, "every experiment is imperfect." Therefore the quasi-experimental design of this research should not cast doubt on the research findings.

In the single-subject research design, each person measured is his or her own control. In this design, "the effects of environmental manipulations on behavior are studied for one subject over a series of time periods" (Richard Jones 1974:4). It is a pre-test post-test design, in which the person is measured before the experiment (control) and again following the experiment. Thus, questions about random sampling from which conclusions may be made for a larger group do not apply.

The active members of the three United Methodist churches of the Guilford, Virginia Charge, which include Guilford, Bloxom, and St. Thomas, were asked to volunteer to participate in a Bible study meeting one evening a week for twelve weeks. The total average Morning Worship Service attendance for the three churches in 1990 was 195. Of these, 31 people participated in the research. The Bible study group used Lyman Coleman's (1987b) model for small groups entitled, Serendipity Training Manual for Groups. For the first six weeks, the group studied Coleman's (1987a) Beginnings: A 6 Week Initiation for a Support Group. This is Coleman's (1987b:71) recommended course for getting acquainted. The next six weeks the group studied the Galatians portion of Coleman's (1989a) 1 John Galatians: Exposing Religious Counterfeits. Before the meetings commenced, all the active members of the three churches were asked to complete "Self-Portrait: My Concerns, Values, and

Beliefs" from Facilitators Manual Self-Portrait: My Concerns, Values, and Beliefs by Merton Strommen (1990). The instrument contains two law/grace scales. (For more information on the instrument, see pages 123-127.) After the twelfth meeting, all of the active church members were asked to complete the instrument again. Volunteers were then recruited for a second twelve-week Bible study group. This group studied "Beginnings" for the first six weeks and the James portion of Coleman's (1989b) 1 Peter James: Living through Difficult Times for the next six weeks. Following this group of meetings, the questionnaire was administered to the active church members of the churches a third time. Thus, the membership of the congregations who participated in the study were divided into three groups:

1. Those who participated for the first twelve weeks.
2. Those who participated for the last twelve weeks.
3. Those who did not participate in the fellowship groups at all.

Each of these three groups were tested three times. In a 24 week period of time, all active members of the churches were asked to respond to the instrument at week 0, at week 12, and at week 24.

In addition to the Strommen instrument, all volunteers were asked to respond to the "individualism" measure in Bales and Couch (1970:509-510) "The Value Profile: A Factor Analytic Study of Value Statements." This measure was administered on weeks 0, 12, and 24. The measure contains

the following statements, to which the respondents agreed or disagreed in six varying degrees:

1. To be superior a man must stand alone.
2. In life, an individual should for the most part "go it alone," assuring himself of privacy, having time to himself, attempting to control his own life.
3. It is the man who stands alone who excites our admiration.
4. The rich internal reward of ideals, of sensitive feelings, of reverie, of self knowledge, is man's true home.
5. One must avoid dependence upon persons or things, the center of life should be found within oneself.
6. The most rewarding object of study any man can find is one's own inner life.
7. Whoever would be a man, must be a nonconformist.
8. Contemplation is the highest form of human activity.
9. The individualist is the man who is most likely to discover the best road to a new future.
10. A man can learn better by striking out boldly on his own than he can by following the advice of others. (Bales and Couch 1970:509-510)

The dates for the field research were May 23-June 27, July 25-August 29, and September 12-November 28, 1970.

The Hypotheses

The main hypothesis of this dissertation that draws on the library research and the field research is that American individualism has a negative impact on the understanding of salvation by grace. The hypotheses below relate to the field research. The field experiment is an attempt to test these hypotheses, which are informed by the insights gained from chapters 2, 3, and 4.

The first hypothesis is that those who participated for the first twelve weeks in a community-building Bible study

group will have an increase in their understanding of salvation by grace (as measured by the Strommen scales) from week 0 to week 12, with a subsequent decrease from week 12 to 24 when the participants were no longer participating in the community-forming Bible study group.

The second hypothesis is that those who participated for the first twelve weeks in a community-building Bible study group will have a decrease in their stated value of individualism as measured by the Bales and Couch measure, with a subsequent increase in individualism from week 12 to week 24 when the participants were no longer participating in the community-forming Bible study group.

The third hypothesis is that those who participated in the community-forming Bible study group from week 12 to 24 will have no significant change in their understanding of salvation by grace from week 0 to week 12, when they were not in a community-forming Bible study group, and an increase in their understanding of salvation by grace from week 12 to week 24, when they were in community.

The fourth hypothesis is that those who participated in the community-forming Bible study group from week 12 to week 24 will have no significant change in their value of individualism from week 0 to week 12, when they were not in community, and a decrease from week 12 to 24, when they participated in a community-forming Bible study group.

The fifth hypothesis is that those who did not participate in either community-forming Bible study group will measure no significant change on either the Strommen scales or the individualism measure from week 0 to week 12 and from week 12 to week 24.

Taken together, these hypotheses will demonstrate (if supported by the research) that the experience of community for Christians increases their understanding of salvation by grace while at the same time decreasing their individualism. In other words, community is necessary to lower individualism and raise grace understanding.

Reliability and Validity

Strommen (1990:9-10) addresses the issues of reliability and validity. Scale number 14, "Awareness of God" contains 9 items with a reliability coefficient of .82. Scale number 15, "Biblical concepts" contains 6 items with a reliability coefficient of .75. Among the "Hoped for Outcomes" of the instrument listed on page 9, the first is "Knowledge of Grace: Perceiving what constitutes a life of faith in contrast to a do-it-yourself religion." Strommen (1990:10) has tested the scales for validity and found, for example, that those who score higher on scales measuring values and beliefs attend church regularly, have family devotions in their home, and give high importance to their faith in Christ. The Strommen instrument is therefore highly credible as a measure of one's understanding of

salvation by grace, and its utilization in this study strengthens the field research as a whole.

The Importance of the Study

If the hypotheses prove correct, the study will provide exploratory empirical evidence that people more readily experience the grace of God when participating in small fellowship groups. This is highly significant, since Benson and Elkin (1990:13) found that 67% of adult members of mainline churches in the United States evidence difficulty in accepting that salvation is a gift. I will present other evidence in Chapter 4 which will demonstrate clearly that North Americans do not understand grace. The field data may warrant research on a larger scale and with variant populations to ascertain the potential of small community groups within the church as a means to helping people enjoy salvation by grace.

If the hypotheses are supported by the field research, the study will provide evidence from behavioral science research to support the theory of a number of biblical scholars, (Stendahl 1963, Markus Barth 1968, Yoder 1972) that "justification by faith is a reality only in community with those fellow-men whom God elected for common justification" (Barth 1968:244-245). Barth and Stendahl argue that Paul's concept of justification by faith must be

understood in the context of the Gentile question, that is, whether the Gentiles should be required to observe the Torah in order to be included in the church. Justification of an individual with a guilty conscience before God is Augustinian thinking, not Pauline (Stendahl 1963:200). For Paul, justification is a social reality whereby Jews and Gentiles can be united in Christ apart from the Torah.

Justification in Christ is thus not an individual miracle happening to this person or that person, which each may seek or possess for himself. Rather justification by grace is a joining together of this person and that person, of the near and the far, of the good and the bad, of the high and the low. It is a social event. No one is joined to Christ except together with a neighbor. (Barth 1968:259)

It should be emphasized that the above scholars do not reject the experience of individual justification altogether. Yoder (1972:218) writes, "[O]ur purpose is not to reverse a prior error by claiming that justification is only social." Again he states,

Let us posit . . . that for Paul righteousness, either in God or in man, might more appropriately be conceived of as having cosmic or social dimensions. Such larger dimensions would not negate the personal character of the righteousness God imputes to those who believe; but by englobing the personal salvation in a fuller reality they would negate the individualism with which we understand such reconciliation. (1972:218-219)

This study will have important implications for missiology. If the hypotheses prove correct, the study will

Provide empirical evidence that the Christian faith cannot be effectively communicated in the United States without challenging American worldview themes. Worldview is the mental map or set of cultural assumptions which lies at the heart of a culture, which is changed only through experience. In the case of this study, salvation by grace is more readily understood when one experiences the support and acceptance of a Christian community.

A number of cultures have been studied by missiologists to discover worldview themes which present obstacles to the communication of the gospel (M. Kraft 1978, Conley 1976). Charles Kraft (1989), has done this for the United States. He demonstrates that American worldview limits North Americans' perception of God's power. This study will demonstrate that American worldview limits the perception of God's grace. Because individualism is a dominant worldview theme for North Americans (Hsu 1972, Spindler and Spindler 1983), Christian communicators in the United States can be more effective by becoming intentional about community. The day may come when missionaries to the United States from the two-thirds world will be effective precisely because they come from a communal culture which offers an alternative to the loneliness, isolation, and guilty conscience of the American mind.

An implication for church growth theory also emerges. Church members who are not engaged in meaningful community

are less likely to experience salvation by grace, and will thus have no faith to share when opportunities for faith sharing occur.

Summary of the Research

This research measures the effect of a specific community experience on the participants' understanding of salvation by grace. While it is not primarily a study in theology nor in anthropology, if it is found that the participants' understanding of salvation by grace is increased in the community experience, the study will have implications for both theology and missiology. That is, the study may corroborate Stendahl's view of Paul's concept of justification by faith, and for missiology, it may supply evidence for the need to build community in the church in order to neutralize American individualism. Without such community, salvation by grace may be only religious language which has no effect on how one lives, both in terms of a relationship to God and in relationship to others.

The study will proceed in the following manner. Chapter 2 will be a review of the literature on American individualism and its relationship to the church. Since individualism is closely related to modernity, literature on the influence of modernity on the church will also be reviewed. Chapter 2 will conclude with a review of the

literature on the Stendahl thesis, which will be the subject of Chapter 3. There I will argue that to understand salvation by grace only in individual terms is unbiblical. The biblical case for community in Chapter 3 will be supported by an argument for the same from cultural anthropology in Chapter 4. In Chapter 5 I will report the results of the field research on how a community experience effected the participants' understanding of salvation by grace, and in Chapter 6 I will make recommendations on how the church might recover community and salvation by grace.

Note

1. Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version.

CHAPTER 2

The Problem of Discovering Grace in American Churches and Culture: A Literature Review

My study of culture at Asbury Theological Seminary introduced me to the concept of worldview. I became especially interested in discovering whether there might be unconscious aspects of the worldview of American culture which might bias one's perception of salvation as an exercise in human effort. I was also anxious to discover whether I and other communicators of the gospel might inadvertently be sending messages based on our cultural pre-suppositions which contradicted the message of salvation by grace.

Worldview and Worldview Change

The concept of worldview has been developed by a number of anthropologists, including Hallowell (1955), W.T. Jones (1972), Kearney (1984), and Redfield (1952). Opler (1945:198) and Hsu (1972:217) have suggested the terms "themes" and "core values" respectively, to delineate that which lies at the heart of a culture.

Missiological anthropologists have related the importance of worldview to the cross-cultural communication of the gospel. Among these are Conn (1984), Hiebert (1985), C.

Kraft (1979), Lingenfelter and Mayers (1986), Loewen (1975), Mayers (1987), and Nida (1954). A Christian missionary familiar with the importance of worldview looks for changes in meaning and attitudes among converts, rather than equating conversion with only behavioral change.

Worldview change is illustrated in Thomas S. Kuhn's (1970), The Structure of Scientific Revolutions. Kuhn deals with "paradigm shift" (1970:150) rather than worldview change, and a paradigm is neither as broad nor as deep as a worldview. That is, a worldview is a more inclusive view of reality than a paradigm. However, the way paradigms shift or change is illustrative of worldview change. The process begins when a sufficient number of anomalies arise which do not fit the prevailing "paradigm" or foundation for normal science (1970:52-53). These anomalies create a period of anxiety and insecurity in the scientific community (1970:67). Eventually another paradigm is proposed which, while always raising new questions, seems to answer some important ones (1970:77). Although the new paradigm gains some adherents, some of the practitioners of the old paradigm, who are frequently older, established scientists, may never be convinced that the new paradigm is better than the old. They eventually die off and the old paradigm dies with them. A significant number of scientists eventually adopt the new paradigm, making a "paradigm shift." This "paradigm shift" includes things old and new:

Since new paradigms are born from old ones, they ordinarily incorporate much of the vocabulary and apparatus, both conceptual and manipulative, that the traditional paradigm had previously employed. But they seldom employ these borrowed elements in quite the traditional way. Within the new paradigm, old terms, concepts, and experiments fall into new relationships one with the other. (1970:149)

William G. McGloughlin's (1978) Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform: An Essay on Religion and Social Change in America: 1607-1977, describes the religious awakenings in American history in terms of worldview change. McGloughlin believes that the great awakenings of American history were necessitated by the breakdown of existing beliefs and norms, so that a modified worldview had to be formulated (1978:xiii,8).

Individualism Is a Dominant Theme in American Worldview

The best known of early observers of American culture was Alexis de Tocqueville, whose Democracy in America (1969 [orig.1835]) identified the prominent place of individualism in the culture. Frederick Jackson Turner's, "Significance of the Frontier in American History," presented the hypothesis that the frontier was the cause of individualism (1894:221).

In their overview of modern anthropological studies on American culture, which include works by Gillin, Gorer, Hsu, Kluckhohn, Mead, Ruesch and Bateson, and Spindler, Spindler and Spindler (1983:58) list ten "characterizations" or "statements of belief" which could be considered worldview themes, the first of which is individualism.

Hsu (1972:218) has identified self-reliance as the single core value of American culture. Hsu believes that American worldview is monothematic. While not isolating self-reliance as the only American worldview theme, Stewart (1972:71) and Hiebert (1985:123) have identified it as one among a few American worldview themes which shape American culture. This study utilizes the definition of individualism of Spindler and Spindler (1983:58), in which self-reliance is included as a form of individualism. That is, individualism is a broader term.

Robert Bellah's, et al. (1985) Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life, investigates the effects of individualism in American culture. The authors believe that Americans increasingly are finding it difficult to make commitments for the common good because of the dominance of utilitarian and expressive individualism (1985:46-49). The same authors have edited (1987) Individualism and Commitment in American Culture: Readings on the Themes of Habits of the Heart. In both works the

authors write that modern individualism has become "the first language" of American society (1985:20, 1987:7).

The Church's Response to American Individualism

The best-known Christian scholar who has addressed the question of communicating the gospel to Western culture is Lesslie Newbigin. This is a project Newbigin took up after spending nearly forty years as a missionary to India. Newbigin has examined this question in his books, Foolishness to the Greeks (1986), and The Gospel in a Pluralist Society (1989). While for Newbigin the core of modern Western culture is modern science, his work is nevertheless significant for a study of Christian faith as it encounters American individualism. Newbigin regards Christianity and modern science as competing worldviews (1989:38). In both his 1986 study and his more recent work, Newbigin (1986:16, 1989:20-21) seeks to show through an analysis of epistemology that the scientific dichotomy between fact and belief is a fallacy, and that the Christian way of viewing reality is no less valid than the scientific one.

Other Christian scholars have seen American individualism as an enemy of the gospel. Vincent Donovan (1989), in his The Church in the Midst of Creation, writes:

The preaching of the gospel in the American accent must come face to face with the fact

that the creed of stark and rugged individualism running through the fiber of our society, through our business and economic and spiritual world, has nothing to do with Christianity. (1989:137)

William A. Dyrness (1989), How Does America Hear the Gospel?, like Donovan and Newbiggin, asks the question of how the gospel might be communicated in the United States from the perspective of one who has spent considerable time outside the culture. Donovan was a missionary to the Masai in Africa while Dyrness was a teacher at Asian Theological Seminary in the Philippines. Like Donovan, Dyrness identifies individualism as a challenge to the gospel:

Individualism in our modern sense of self-sufficiency seems more closely related to the attempt of Adam and Eve to be their own gods. The self-realizing, self-defining individual too often becomes a barrier to hearing the cries of his neighbor or obeying the voice of God. (1989:103)

While Donovan and Dyrness identify individualism as a threat to true Christian faith in the United States, Bellah and co-authors (1985:245) show that the church in America, while calling for commitments to God and neighbor which would seem to neutralize individualism, has actually been a source of individualism and insecurity. Corroborating evidence that the church produces insecurity has been presented by Cohen's (1982) "Induced Christian Neurosis." Cohen is a psychologist who has counseled a number of evangelical believers. He believes that the evangelical church in America creates insecurity in believers by

presenting divine "double bind" commands which are impossible to obey. Examples of such commands are "die in order to live," "be last in order to be first," and "live a sinless life while clothed in the imperfection of humanity" (1982:10). Other double binds consist of the "be-spontaneous" paradox, in which believers feel guilty when they cannot of their own will produce happy or joyful feelings, etc. (1982:10).

Further evidence that the church produces insecurity is Mebane and Ridley (1988) "The Role-Sending of Perfectionism: Overcoming Counterfeit Spirituality." The authors' thesis is that pastors are not honest with their congregations about their failures. They thus communicate through modeling or role-sending that normal Christian living is above failure. The result is a perfectionist understanding of the Christian life, which creates insecurity among the laity since they cannot attain to a Christian life without failure (1988:335).

The church, called to confront culture where it is plagued by sin, is often so influenced by the culture and its worldview that it merely reflects it. The writings of Bellah, Cohen, and Mebane and Ridley indicate that the church reflects American individualism, while observers with cross-cultural experience like Donovan and Dryness find American individualism to be incompatible with the gospel. There are other scholars who are quite concerned that the

church in America has become a mere reflection of American values. Marsden (1984) has edited a collection of essays by evangelical scholars entitled, Evangelicalism and Modern America. Part Two is entitled, "Challenging or Reflecting the Culture?"

Unsecular America, edited by Richard Neuhaus (1986), is a collection of papers read and discussed at a conference for evangelical scholars. The papers were responses to recent survey results which showed that Americans, unlike other Western cultures, are not becoming increasingly secular. George Marsden, among others, expressed the concern that religion might be popular in America because it reflected the culture (1986:89), or that American Christianity is just "secularism in disguise" (100). Marsden's indictment on the church is consistent with the findings of Bellah, Cohen, and Mebane and Ridley above. If the church does indeed reflect American cultural values it is likely that individualism as a dominant cultural theme is prominent in that reflection.

Tony Campolo echoes a similar theme. His (1985) Partly Right, bemoans the burn-out of many evangelical Christians who hear only "bad news." His 1987 article, "The Demise of Evangelicalism," is even more explicit. Among other reasons for the demise, Campolo feels the evangelical church has become too much like the culture in which and to which it seeks to minister (1987:20).

The question of the church reflecting American cultural values which are inconsistent with biblical faith is suggested by the tendency of American churches to communicate a moralistic message. This has been documented by Gaustad (1987), Faith of Our Fathers: Religion and the New Nation, Marty (1984), Pilgrims in Their Own Land: 500 Years of Religion in America, and Finke and Stark (1989), "How the Upstart Sects Won America: 1776-1850." A moralistic message is suitable for a people whose worldview is colored by self-reliant individualism. Moralism is a major topic in French theologian Jacques Ellul's (1986) The Subversion of Christianity. Ellul (1986:69) writes, "God's revelation has nothing whatever to do with morality. Nothing. Absolutely nothing." Ellul is not an antinomian. On the contrary, Ellul (1986:71) believes that "the behavior to which we are summoned surpasses morality." The church, however, has settled for a morality which "more or less corresponds to the society of the day" (1986:72). Thus, for Ellul, the church throughout most of its history has chosen to reflect the moral values of the culture rather than to insist on the higher demands of the gospel ethic.

Theologically untrained people seem more prone to a moralistic understanding of Christianity. In Walter Brueggemann's 1989 Lyman Beecher Lectures at Yale Divinity School, published as Finally Comes the Poet: Daring Speech for Proclamation (1989), the author notes that, "In their

yet-to-be-formed condition, seminarians largely preach sermons filled with 'ought' and 'must' and 'should'" (1989:84).

Recent research confirms the moralistic content of the American "gospel." Benson and Eklin (1990), Effective Christian Education: A National Study of Protestant Congregations, reports the findings of a national three and one-half year study conducted on five mainline denominations and the Southern Baptist Convention. The study found that "a large percentage of mainline adults (67%) evidence difficulty in accepting that salvation is a gift rather than something earned" (1990:13).

J. Russell Hale's (1980) interviews of the unchurched, The Unchurched: Who They Are and Why They Stay Away, is yet further evidence that Christianity in America is largely understood as moralistic. Hale (1980:184) found that the message coming from American pulpits as perceived by the unchurched was "overloaded with law, moralism, judgment, and rejection."

Dean Kelley's (1977) book, Why Conservative Churches Are Growing, argues that conservative churches grow because they provide meaning in people's lives (1977:52). In order for religious ideas to provide meaning they must include demand, since people do not value that which costs nothing. Meaning is validated by

a personal and social earnestness shown in the investment by real people of time,

money, effort, reputation, and self in the meaning and the movement that bears it. What costs nothing, accomplishes nothing. If it costs nothing to belong to such a community, it can't be worth much. (1977:53)

While Kelley's work clearly presents the need for churches to challenge their constituents and call them to commitment, one wonders whether the commitment demanded by many conservative churches is the demand of law or the demand of love. One of the reasons conservative churches may grow is because their moralistic message is more comprehensible in a worldview where individualism dominates reality. Mainline churches may be in decline because, as Kelley asserts, they do not provide a religion which makes demands on their members and thus fail to convince them of the value of their religious ideas. They are too permissive. One must remember however, that grace is more demanding than law; love more than duty. In the words of Ellul (1986:71), "the behavior to which we are summoned surpasses morality." Thus, a church need not present a moralistic message in order to create the demands necessary to provide meaning. Mainline churches could provide meaning for their members by presenting the demand of grace. In the words of the old hymn, "Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all." The fact that they are in decline, taken together with the findings of Benson and Eklin, indicates that the message of costly grace is not

being successfully communicated in the mainline churches.

The case for the church reflecting American culture can be taken even further. Peter Berger et al. (1973) The Homeless Mind: Modernization and Consciousness, discusses modernity as a worldview, and shows its close association with individualism (1973:196). A number of Christian scholars are alarmed by the threat of modernity to the integrity of the church, including theologian Thomas Oden (1990), After Modernity . . . What?: Agenda for Theology, sociologist S.D. Gaede (1985), Belonging: Our Need for Community in Church and Family, and philosopher Os Guinness (1989), "Mission in the Face of Modernity: Nine Checkpoints on Mission Without Worldliness in the Modern World."

The influence of modernity on the evangelical church in America has been researched by James D. Hunter. In his (1987), Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation, Hunter documents his research among evangelical students at Christian colleges and secular universities. Hunter found that orthodox faith suffered greater erosion among evangelical students at Christian colleges than at secular universities. He thus argues that evangelical institutions of higher education are themselves effective carriers of that modernity which evangelicalism seeks to resist. In his (1983), American Evangelicalism: Conservative Religion in the Quandary of Modernity, Hunter argues that the evangelical church is unwittingly being shaped by modernity.

As modern science has proposed explanations for what was once attributed to God, the evangelical church has lost a sense of God's transcendence. Modernity causes people to think in terms of components, and in the evangelical church salvation is often taught in terms of steps or stages. How to be a Christian, etc. is reduced to five easy steps, with little emphasis on the mysterious and transcendent reality of God.

As a result of this loss of transcendence, some evangelical Christians have not been satisfied with the worship in their churches. A few have left their churches and joined other churches which are more liturgical--which have a sense of mystery in their worship. This has been documented by Webber (1985), Evangelicals on the Canterbury Trail: Why Evangelicals Are Attracted to the Liturgical Church, and Snyder and Runyon (1986), Foresight: Ten Major Trends that Will Dramatically Affect the Future of Christians and the Church.

A number of scholars have noted that something is wrong in the church in Western culture, and frequently the critique of the church has included a call for a rediscovery of the church as community. This call is coming from both mainline and evangelical quarters. An example of a mainline call for community is Hauerwas and Willimon (1989), Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony. The authors' thesis is that American culture is no longer sympathetic to

Christianity (Constantinianism), and the church must therefore understand itself as a community of resident aliens which challenges and resists the cultural values of modern America. "The challenge facing today's Christians," the authors write, "is not the necessity to translate Christian convictions into a modern idiom, but rather to form a community" (1989:170-171).

An evangelical work on the need for community in the church is Webber and Clapp (1988), People of the Truth: The Power of the Worshipping Community in the Modern World. The authors (1988:103) stress "the importance of witness by a body of Christians (the church) and not simply individual Christians operating more or less independently."

The call for community in the church is not surprising given the individualism of Western culture. Chinese theologian Carver Yu notes that in Western culture,

man is perceived as an atomistic ego-subject, subsisting in itself. This entails individualism and therefore a contractual society. Meaningful relationships cannot be fully realized in such a society, and therefore a deep sense of the crisis of community arises. (1987:143)

Renewing the church through the rediscovery of community is the general concern of Howard A. Snyder's (1980), The Radical Wesley: And Patterns for Church Renewal, The Community of the King (1977), and The Problem of Wineskins: Church Structure in a Technological Age (1975). Snyder cites the importance of small renewal groups (ecclesiolae)

such as Wesley's bands for the life of the church (1980:138). He believes that community should have priority in the church over proclamation:

If Jesus Christ actually gave more time to preparing a community of disciples than to proclaiming the good news (which he did), then the contemporary church must also recognize the importance of community for proclamation. . . . But four biblical truths should call us back to the priority of community: (1) the concept of the people of God, (2) the model of Christ with his disciples, (3) the example of the early church, and (4) the explicit teachings of Jesus and the apostles. (1977:74)

The prominence of the concept of the people of God in scripture is shown by Paul D. Hanson (1986), The People Called: The Growth of Community in the Bible, and Gerhard Lohfink (1984), Jesus and Community: the Social Dimension of Christian Faith.

A classic work on the "blessing" of Christian community is Bonhoeffer's (1954) Life Together. Bonhoeffer writes:

let him who until now has had the privilege of living a common Christian life with other Christians praise God's grace from the bottom of his heart. Let him thank God on his knees and declare: It is grace, nothing but grace, that we are allowed to live in community with Christian brethren. . . . Communal life is again being recognized by Christians today as the grace that it is, as the extraordinary, the "roses and lilies" of the Christian life. (1954:20-21)

An excellent chapter on community and prayer is found in Henri J.M. Nouwen (1975), Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life. For Nouwen (1975:153), "'community'

points a way of togetherness in which people can experience themselves as a meaningful part of a larger group." The basis of the community is God's divine call, and the language of the community is prayer. "Praying is not one of the many things the community does . . . it is its very being" (1975:156).

An important work on John Wesley's class meetings is David Lowes Watson (1985) The Early Methodist Class Meeting: Its Origins and Significance. For Watson (1985:144), the purpose of the class meeting was for the members to "watch over one another in love, lest they should make shipwreck of their faith."

A number of studies have been done on the effects of community. Among them is Galligan-Stierle and Rapp (1981) "A Course in Religious Community and its Effects on Self-Concept." The authors found significant increases on the Tennessee Self Concept Scale among 10 students who took a four week course entitled "Experiences in Christian Community" which included a seven day off-campus community experience. In Ratzlaff (1976), "Salvation: Individualistic or Communal?" the author led his congregation in a six week course using Lyman Coleman's (1972), Rap: A Mini Course in Christian Lifestyle. Participants showed a significant increase in purpose in life and a significant decrease in depression.

The Case for Paul's Concept of Justification
by Faith as a Social Reality

Several scholars believe that Paul's concept of justification by faith should be understood within the context of the Gentile question as a social concept. The Jew-Gentile debate has been forgotten in church history and Paul's message has been modernized and Westernized into the language of modern man's concern for his own authenticity. These scholars include Stendahl (1963), "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West," Markus Barth (1968), "Jews and Gentiles: The Social Character of Justification by Faith," and John Howard Yoder (1972), The Politics of Jesus, which is mostly a restatement of Stendahl and Barth. Barth attempts to demonstrate through exegesis of Galatians 2:11-21 that the two themes of justification by faith and unity between Jews and Gentiles were identical. Markus Barth's (1971), Justification is another important book. Barth sets his argument in a scheme of five days of judgment, presenting justification in narrative and dramatic terms.

This study will focus on the work of Krister Stendahl. His 1963 essay and his (1976), Paul Among Jews and Gentiles are the principal works in which his thesis is presented. He has been challenged by scholars who take issue with his theological method, especially his distinction between what

Scripture meant to the original readers and what it means for modern people. This method Stendahl presented in his (1962) "Biblical Theology, Contemporary," an article in the Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, and his (1965) "Method in the Study of Biblical Theology." Stendahl's method was challenged by Avery Dulles (1965), "Response to Krister Stendahl's 'Method in the Study of Biblical Theology'", and by Ben C. Ollenburger (1986), "What Krister Stendahl 'Meant'--A Normative Critique of 'Descriptive Biblical Theology.'"

Critics of Stendahl's method seem not to object to its validity, but to the implication that the historical-critical method, with its claim to discover what a particular text meant, is superior to all other methodologies. The recent rise and helpfulness of other methodologies make it clear that the historical-critical method must share time with other valuable approaches to biblical study:

These ideas have come under severe attack as the hegemony of the "historical-critical" method is challenged by "literary" and other forms of criticism. . . . [T]hese methods have been forced to share time with various "synchronic" methods which locate meaning somewhere between the text (and its "structures") and the reader. (Haynes 1988:73)

It is significant to note that recent scholarship using methods developed by the social sciences to interpret biblical texts has corroborated Stendahl's thesis. Bruce

Malina (1981), The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology, and Derek Tidball (1984), The Social Context of the New Testament: A Sociological Analysis, clearly show that the Mediterranean world of New Testament times did not share the modern Western worldview with its individualistic lens. Bruce Malina (1979) addresses the Stendahl thesis directly in his "The Individual and the Community--Personality in the Social World of Early Christianity." Malina (1979:132) concludes that "Stendahl . . . is quite correct in dissociating Paul of Tarsus from the introspective conscience of the West."

Stendahl's critics have generally not taken issue with the conclusions of his seminal essay. Even those who have attacked his method have conceded that he has made important contributions in Pauline studies (Ollenberger 1986:71). Only Ernst Kasemann (1971), Perspectives on Paul, takes serious issue with Stendahl's "Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West." And yet Kasemann does not take issue with Stendahl's attempt to show the social character of justification as used by Paul:

That God's grace and righteousness relate to the world and intend a new creation, not merely a number of believing individuals, seems to me an irrelinquishable truth if the Christian message is to be the foundation of anything more than merely private piety.
(Kasemann 1971:78)

Stendahl's 1976 work is much more controversial. In it the Harvard dean presents the thesis that justification by faith was God's provision for Gentiles alone, not Jews. The Jews will be saved mysteriously by God. In the meantime the missionary urge to convert the Jews must be kept in check (1976:4). Paul was not converted to another and different religion, but called as a messenger to the Gentiles (1976:vi,7). This assertion is open to debate, since Paul did not agree with the Jews on the question of the identity of Jesus. Was he the Messiah, the Son of God? (Acts 10:20, 22). Did Paul not preach the faith he once tried to destroy (Galatians 1:23)? Does not such a turn-around constitute a conversion? Didn't Paul himself preach in the synagogue until he and his message were rejected? Accordingly, much has been written to refute Stendahl at this point (Haynes 1988, Hafemann 1988). Yet these scholars do not take issue with Stendahl's earlier position on Paul's view of the law:

There is no basis from Romans 9-11 for calling into question Stendahl's critique of the "introspective conscience of the West" and its implications for rethinking Paul's view of the law. This project is well underway by Pauline scholars and ought to be continued. But there is reason to doubt "Stendahl's thesis that Paul's doctrine of justification by faith applied only to Gentiles and that Paul never attempted to draw out the implications of this doctrine for unbelieving Jews or Jewish Christians. (Hafemann 1988:54-55)

An early work which recognizes the danger of reading too much of the modern Western worldview back into the New Testament is Henry J. Cadbury's (1937), The Peril of Modernizing Jesus. He writes that few writers and thinkers "trouble themselves to acquire an intimate knowledge of the thinking categories of the ancient world" (1937:28).

Another earlier work which challenges the centrality of Paul's doctrine of justification by faith is Albert Schweitzer (1931), The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle.

Conclusion

This review of literature presents some clues that may explain my personal difficulty with grasping salvation by grace. It also suggests why my sermons which emphasized what God has done for us in Christ met with blank stares from the members of the congregation. It reveals the enormous power of worldview to shape a person's perceptions of reality, including theological views of reality. The literature suggests that American individualism is a worldview assumption which clashes with the doctrine of salvation by grace, yet is communicated by the church. This may be a reason that my own experience of grace is tentative, and that I find myself relapsing into thinking in terms of human-effort salvation. The pull of culture,

communicated even in the church, is a constant drag on one's understanding of salvation by grace.

We have also seen that Krister Stendahl's work on justification by faith in Paul's writings indicate that biblical justification or salvation by grace may have social content, which suggests that placing people in community groups may help them experience salvation by grace. The investigation of the social dimension of justification by faith is therefore of considerable importance, since it may give biblical support for overcoming the individualistic bias of salvation by grace in the United States. To this investigation we now turn.

CHAPTER 3

Justification by Faith: Grace Is a Social as Well as an Individual Reality

Justification by faith is the cardinal doctrine of Protestantism. It is the foundation upon which the church is established. Few today would question the central place of this doctrine among those who still take classical Protestantism seriously. The church should rightly be cautious about tampering with the center of Christian faith. I raise a question about this doctrine, as it has been articulated in Protestantism, with no desire to undermine it. I only desire to make the communication of the doctrine more effective. The fact is that many people have made a serious commitment to Christ and yet fail to comprehend the significance of justification by faith in their lives. They thus practice a weak Christianity in which they largely must be their own savior. That was the only kind of Christianity I knew until that day when the thought entered my mind, "Look away from yourself to the cross. There's your hope."

John Wesley's order of salvation includes prevenient or "preventing" grace, justifying grace, and sanctifying grace (Wesley 1872:Vol.VI,509). Prevenient grace is grace before conversion or justification, "including the first wish to please God, the first dawn of light concerning his will, and the first slight transient conviction of having sinned

against him" (Wesley 1872:Vol.VI,509). It is God's pursuit of the sinner. An awakened sinner is one who has been convicted of sin and the judgment by prevenient grace--by God the Holy Spirit. Sanctifying grace is perfecting grace or grace from conversion onward. It begins at justification (initial sanctification) and continues "till, in another instant, the heart is cleansed from all sin, and filled with pure love to God and man" (1872:Vol.VI,509). Wesley writes that "even that love increases more and more" (1872:Vol.VI,509). Wesley thus believed that God relates to people by grace in its varying forms from the first stirring of conviction over sin until death.

While this study focuses on justifying grace, it has implications for grace in all forms. In the post-Enlightenment worldview of North Americans God does not exist. Since the effect of the worldview is to make faith in God difficult, grace in any form is difficult to apprehend. That is, it is difficult to believe that God is relating to a sinner with prevenient grace or to a believer with sanctifying grace when the worldview denies the existence of God.

The Problem of "Individual Justification"

This chapter addresses the question of Paul's understanding of justification by faith. Did Paul use the

term to denote the justification of a guilty sinner before a righteous God on the basis of faith in Christ; that is, only individually, or did justification by faith for Paul also contain a social dimension? Is commitment to Jesus Christ a social commitment? Or is it only a personal, private, spiritual commitment to God? Before attempting to answer this question, it will first be necessary to define justification as understood in the classic Protestant tradition.

Arminius defines justification as

a just and gracious act of God by which, from the throne of His grace and mercy, He absolves from his sins man, who is a sinner but who is a believer, on account of Christ, and His obedience and righteousness, and considers him righteous to the divine righteousness and grace. (quoted in Wiley 1952:380)

John Wesley defines it as

that act of God the Father, whereby, for the sake of the propitiation made by the blood of His Son, he "sheweth forth His righteousness (or mercy) by the remission of the sins that are past." (1872 Vol.V:57)

Again, H. Orton Wiley defines justification by faith as

that judicial or declarative act of God, by which He pronounces those who believingly accept the propitiatory offering of Christ, as absolved from their sins, released from their penalty, and accepted as righteous before Him. (1952:381)

Since the above definitions are quite technical, I present one for my lay readers: Justification by faith is God's

pardon of sinners who accept the death of Christ on their behalf.

In his section on the nature of justification, Wiley delineates five features:

1. Evangelical justification is the remission of sins.
2. Justification is both an act and a state.
3. Justification is a relative change, and not the work of God by which we are made actually just and righteous.
4. Justification is a forensic or judicial act.
5. Justification is an instantaneous, personal and comprehensive act. (1952:382-394)

Justification in Protestant theology has, from the time of the Reformation, been understood in terms of law and gospel. The central message of the Reformation was that a person is justified before God by faith in Christ alone, that is, by God, and not by keeping the law, or works.

According to the apostle in Romans 1, the gospel is a preaching of the incarnate Son of God, given to us without any merit on our part for salvation and peace. It is a word of salvation, a word of grace, a word of comfort, a word of joy, a voice of the bridegroom and the bride, a good word, a word of peace. . . . But the law is a word of destruction, a word of wrath, a word of sadness, a word of grief, a voice of the judge and the defendant, a word of restlessness, a word of curse. For according to the apostle, "The law is the power of sin" and "the law brings wrath"; it is a law of death. (Luther 1957 Vol.31:231)

It is worth noting that this Reformation distinction has been the subject of recent theological debate. Paul Althaus (1966:1) writes, "The problem of law and gospel;

which is the classic theme of all truly evangelical theology, today has once more become a focal point of theological reflection." The problem seems to be, how can we understand justification to be by grace and still hold persons accountable for their actions? Luther's distinction opens the door to antinomianism. Thus, Karl Barth placed some of the blame for the failure of the German church before Hitler on Luther:

The German people are suffering from the legacy of the greatest Christian German, from the error of Martin Luther in regard to the relationship between law and gospel, between secular and spiritual regulations and authority. (cited in Fuller 1980:5 note)

Markus Barth (1968:242-243) laments that Paul's doctrine of justification by faith "does not appear to have any necessary place for the fellow-man." From the days of Augustine to the time of the Reformation and of orthodox Protestantism its exposition "has been notable indeed for great joy in the grace of God but not for special interest in fellow-man." Markus Barth's comments focus the question of this research, so I quote him at length:

[T]he debates of Augustine with Pelagius, of the Reformers with the Catholics, of the Lutherans with the Reformed theologians, were not outstanding examples of special interest in the fellow-humanity of men. Each for himself pretended to know exactly how he himself was justified. That others would . . . follow the same pattern as "I" was considered natural and indisputable. It cannot be denied that a danger lurks here--the danger of a crass individualism [emphasis mine]. . . . There is also the

danger of a missing ethical perspective. . .
 . With the fading out of the Christological
 center . . . every chance was lost for
 recovering the social and ethical character
 of justification. (1968:243)

Markus Barth readily admits that ethics is not omitted from any responsible theology. But he is concerned that separating ethics from justification and making it part of sanctification or the fruit of justification opens the door to "a missing ethical perspective" (1968:243).

The question arises, is our present individualistic understanding of justification by faith true to what Paul intended, or did his doctrine contain a social or corporate dimension lost by Western interpreters? To put the question another way, how much of the Western, individualistic "gospel" is culturally conditioned? Are loneliness, alienation, and the struggle for self-worth--cultural realities from which church members are not immune--part of the normal struggles of the Christian life, or have American Christians been victimized, not only by cultural individualism, but by Western, individualistic theology?

Krister Stendahl's View of Paul's Doctrine of Justification by Faith

It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to answer the above question definitively, but I do hope to provide evidence from field research to suggest that justification

by faith is more readily experienced in social or community settings. Any conclusive correction of the reformers will have to be done by biblical and historical theologians. Such a correction has already been attempted by a respected biblical scholar, and--I will argue--his thesis has not been seriously challenged. I refer to Krister Stendahl, for many years Dean and Lord John O'Brian Professor at the Divinity School of Harvard University. His thesis was first set forth in a paper delivered as the invited address at the Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association, September 3, 1961, and was subsequently published in the Harvard Theological Review (1963:199-215). The article is entitled, "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West." Stendahl (1976) elaborated further on his thesis in Paul Among Jews and Gentiles: And Other Essays. Justification Is Not Paul's Answer for Guilt

In Stendahl's view, Western interpreters of Paul have "modernized" him by failing to understand the concrete historical situation that prompted his writings. They have approached the Scriptures with the assumption that this is God's word for all time and all people, and thus, "written directly to me." By failing to understand the specific historical situations and the issues which prompted Paul to write as he did, Western interpreters have found answers to modern questions in Paul's writings which Paul never asked himself. Specifically, Augustine, who "may well have been

one of the first to express the dilemma of the introspective conscience" (Stendahl 1963:203), and who might fairly be called "the first modern man" (1963:205), found in Paul's statements on justification by faith an answer to his question of how a guilt-stricken sinner might be justified before God.

Martin Luther, of course, was an Augustinian monk, who lived in a time when the introspective conscience was intensified. This was brought about by (a) the black death, and (b) the end of the European mission (1963:203). In the case of the first, "penetrating self-examination reached a height of hitherto unknown intensity" (1963:203). In the case of the latter, the focus of Penance shifted from Baptism, administered once for all, "to the ever repeated Mass" (1963:203).

Paul however, did not have a guilty conscience. In fact, Stendahl argues that Paul had a

rather robust conscience. . . . In Philippians 3 Paul speaks most fully about his life before his Christian calling, and there is no indication that he had had any difficulty in fulfilling the Law. On the contrary, he can say that he had been "flawless" as to the righteousness required by the Law (v.6). His encounter with Jesus Christ--at Damascus, according to Acts 9:1-9--has not changed this fact. It was not to him a restoration of a plagued conscience; when he says that he now forgets what is behind him (Philippians 3:13), he does not think about the shortcomings in his obedience to the Law, but about his glorious achievements as a righteous Jew, achievements which he nevertheless now has learned to consider as "refuse" in the light

of his faith in Jesus the Messiah.
(1963:200)

Aware that Paul has been traditionally interpreted as the apostle of the introspective conscience, Stendahl builds his case in which he answers anticipated objections.

First, if Paul in fact had a robust conscience, then why did he speak of the impossibility of keeping the law (Romans 2:17-3:20)? Stendahl (1963:201) points out that many interpreters have accused Paul at this point of misunderstanding or deliberately distorting the Jewish view of the law and salvation, since for the Jew the Law did not require a static or pedantic perfectionism, but supposed a covenant relationship in which there was room for forgiveness and repentance and where God applied the measure of grace. Alongside Romans 2:17 Stendahl would place Philippians 3:6, "I was blameless as to righteousness--of the Law, that is." In Romans 2-3 the situation is different. There Paul is speaking of the Jews as a nation, and shows that they have not lived any better than the Gentiles. The law has not helped. Now that Christ has come, the law is not a valid alternative any more. Paul's references to the impossibility of keeping the law are therefore to be understood as "part of a theological and theoretical scriptural argument about the relation between Jews and Gentiles" (Stendahl 1963:202). Stendahl further argues that "it is . . . striking to note that Paul never

urges Jews to find in Christ the answer to the anguish of a plagued conscience" (1963:202).

Second, one might object from I Timothy (which Stendahl rejects as Pauline) that Paul called himself the number one sinner. Stendahl (1963:209) answers that this is "not an expression of contrition in the present tense," but refers to Paul's violent persecution of the church. Furthermore,

Paul knew that he had made up for this terrible Sin of persecuting the Church, as he says in so many words in I Cor. 15:10 " . . . his grace toward me was not in vain; on the contrary, I worked harder than any of them--though it was not I, but the grace of God which is with me." (1963:209)

Third, one might ask if Paul was conscious of committing sin after conversion. Stendahl (1963:209) writes that it is very clear that Paul did not hold that man was free from sin after baptism. Further, Paul was patient with the sins and weaknesses of Christians. But Stendahl asks:

[D]oes he ever intimate that he is aware of any sins of his own which would trouble his conscience? It is actually easier to find statements to the contrary. The tone in Acts 23:1, "Brethren, I have lived before God in all good conscience up to this day," prevails also throughout his letters. . . . [T]he conspicuous absence of references to an actual consciousness of being a sinner is surprising. (1963:209)

Stendahl (1963:202) notes in another section of the paper that "'forgiveness' is the term for salvation which is used least of all in the Pauline writings."

Stendahl leaves for last his most serious challenge, that of Romans 7, which contains an often used "proof text for Paul's deep insights into the human predicament: 'I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want to do is what I do' (Rom.7:19)" (1963:211). Stendahl responds that Paul is not primarily concerned here with humankind's or his own cloven ego or predicament, but with the law:

The diatribe style of the chapter helps us to see what Paul is doing. In vv. 7-12 he works out an answer to the semi-rhetorical question: "Is the Law sin?" The answer reads: "Thus the Law is holy, just, and good." This leads to the equally rhetorical question: "Is it then this good (Law) which brought death to me?", and the answer is summarized in v.25b: "So then, I myself serve the Law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the Law of Sin" (i.e., the Law "weakened by sin" [8:3] leads to death, just as a medicine which is good in itself can cause death to a patient whose organism [flesh] cannot take it). (1963:211-212)

Stendahl therefore argues that Romans 7 is a "defense for the holiness and goodness of the Law" (1963:212).

Even more convincing is Stendahl's observation that Paul distinguishes between the law, the sin, and the flesh, so that the ego ("I") is acquitted:

The observation that "I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want to do is what I do" does not lead directly over to the exclamation: "Wretched man that I am! . . ." but, on the contrary, to the statement, "Now if I do what I do not want, then it is not I who do it, but the sin which dwells in me." The argument is one of acquittal of the ego, not one of utter contrition. Such a line of thought would be

impossible if Paul's intention were to describe man's predicament. (1963:212)

Stendahl concludes that the anthropological references in Romans 7 are part of an argument about the holiness and goodness of the law.

The Social Context of Justification

If justification by faith was not Paul's answer to the question of how a guilty, conscience-plagued sinner can stand before God, what was the specific historical situation which prompted its place in Scripture? Stendahl (1963:3) is sure that the doctrine reflects Paul's calling to be an apostle to the Gentiles. It is Paul's argument for the inclusion of the Gentiles into the people of God apart from keeping the Torah. In another essay he notes (1976:25), "The peculiarly Pauline connotation of the term 'justification,' justification by faith rather than works, is confined to Romans and Galatians, particularly Romans." Thus, justification by faith has its theological context in Paul's reflection on the relation between Jews and Gentiles. When challenged by the Judaizers in Galatia, or faced with a church of Jews and Gentiles in Rome, justification by faith is prominent in Paul's writings.

In fact, there are many places in Paul's letters where justification by faith is mentioned in the context of Jewish-Gentile relations. Paul's rebuke of Peter in Galatians 2:11-21 is a case in point. There Peter had table

fellowship with Gentiles until emissaries from James appeared. Then he separated himself from the Gentile table. Paul's rebuke includes a discussion of justification by faith.

Stendahl (1963:205) indicates that Romans 9-11 has been an enigma to biblical scholars because they have approached Romans with the presupposition that the main question of the book is how a sinner can be saved. Romans 9-11 seems like an appendix. But if justification by faith is the answer to how the Gentiles can enjoy full fellowship in the kingdom of God apart from keeping the Torah, then Romans 9-11 can be seen as the climax of the book.

Further, Stendahl (1963:203-204) argues that the early church was fairly silent on Paul's writings in the second and third centuries. Paul was loved and appreciated, but his doctrine of justification by faith was not prevalent in theological reflection. The reason? Once the church had become a Gentile church justification by faith had become a dead issue. The question of the Gentiles was irrelevant. It remained for Augustine, who was unaware of or ignored the historical situation which prompted the doctrine, to rediscover Paul in his Confessions.

Stendahl Employs a Salvation History Hermeneutic

Stendahl's insights into Paul are the result of his understanding of the Scriptures as salvation history. He has been influenced by Oscar Cullmann, whose name is

associated with salvation history in the New Testament (Donahue 1989:320). Stendahl (1962:421) called Cullmann "perhaps the most productive contemporary writer in the field of New Testament theology."

Cullmann's view of salvation history is summarized by Donahue. His understanding of eschatology is significant.

Whereas Bultmann dealt with the eschatological language of the NT by demythologizing it in such a way that the future becomes the existential future faced by the believer in the decision of faith, for Cullmann eschatology is a doctrine about the future and the end of time. In one sense an end has come to salvation history, since in Jesus the promises of the OT have been fulfilled. Yet Jesus, who stood at the turning of the ages, represents also a beginning, so that NT eschatology is a combination of the "already" and the "not yet." The Church lives in the "middle of time," as the final act of God's plan begins to unfold. For Cullmann, Jesus, who had a messianic awareness of being both redemptive servant and Son of Man, saw himself as inaugurating the end time, and the early Church interpreted his resurrection as part of the end-time scenario. The events of the life of Jesus and the action of God in the early Church which are revealed to apostolic witnesses constitute NT salvation history. The function of a NT theology is to redescribe the unfolding of this plan. (1989:321)

How significant is the salvation history hermeneutic to Stendahl's theology? The following suggests it is highly significant:

The framework of "Sacred History" which we have found to be that of Pauline Theology . . . opens up a new perspective for systematic theology and practical theology. The Pauline ephapax ("once for all", Rom. 6:10) cannot be translated fully and only

into something repeated in the life of every individual believer. . . . We find ourselves in the new situation (aeon) where the faith in the Messiah Jesus gives us the right to be called Children of God (I John 3:1). (Stendahl 1963:214-215)

In Stendahl's essay, "Justification and the Last Judgment," eschatology dominates his ethics. He writes:

One can be "bad or good," but one cannot be "more or less." Here one either is or isn't. One of the aspects of the eschatological crisis is exactly this--that now there is no grey, there is only black and white. This is a gross simplification from the human point of view, but it is a simplification which is in the very nature of the eschatological event. (1961:2)

It should be noted that Stendahl can understand salvation history in this way only by denying Pauline authorship of several epistles traditionally attributed to him. Most notable for its absence in the list Stendahl (1976:127) attributes to Paul is II Thessalonians, which deals with the delay of the eschaton. Thus, the salvation history hermeneutic might be less attractive to some evangelical scholars who hold to traditional positions of Pauline authorship.

A salvation history hermeneutic has much to commend itself. First, it gives NT eschatology a more prominent place in NT theology than "last chapter" or "appendix" status. Stendahl writes:

Christian theology has always tried to do justice to the historical element in the biblical material. But under the pressure

of the thought-pattern inherent in the Western theological approach, biblical eschatology--i.e., the matrix of NT thought--was taken care of in a "last chapter" of systematic theology dealing with the "last things." . . . Thereby the very structure of biblical thought was transformed and its eschatology inactivated. (1962:425)

Even a casual reading of the NT suggests that eschatology was more important in the NT world than it is in modern NT theology. Second, the missiologist, who is greatly aware of differences between cultures, finds a hermeneutic which acknowledges the gap between the NT world and modern humanity more appealing than one which minimizes it.

Thus, for example, Stendahl's hermeneutic has more affinity with the missiologist's understanding of the uniqueness of cultures than does Bultmann's, who assumed that people in all times and places ask the same existential questions. Stendahl (1963:208) chided Bultmann for his false presupposition, but commented that at least Bultmann was aware that this assumption was the starting place for his hermeneutic, though he stated the presupposition with the force of an a priori truth. Other scholars have approached the Scriptures with similar false assumptions, but without such awareness.

The Critique of Stendahl

Ernst Kasemann

Stendahl's thesis was challenged by Ernst Kasemann (1971:60-78), Perspectives on Paul, in a chapter entitled, "Justification and Salvation History in the Epistle to the Romans." Kasemann does not take issue with Stendahl's salvation history hermeneutic but believes he takes it too far. He writes:

It cannot be seriously disputed that salvation history forms the horizon of Pauline theology. But the significance of this horizon is anything but decided. It could be a component part of a traditional early Christian Weltanschauung which Paul took over without reflection, and might then even be an inappropriate framework for his specific proclamation. On the other hand, it could be the key-note of his message or one of its most important aspects. (1971:71)

Kasemann asks two questions of Paul's doctrine of justification. First, "is it, as a fighting doctrine, so conditioned by its time that we must call it obsolete today?" (1971:71). Kasemann (1971:71) answers that the doctrine clearly grew up in the course of the "anti-Jewish" struggle, but that does not make it obsolete today.

Our task is to ask: what does the Jewish nomism against which Paul fought really represent? And our answer must be: it represents the community of 'good' people which turns God's promises into their own privileges and God's commandments into the instruments of self-sanctification. (1971:72)

One might ask why Jewish nomism must represent anything? Kasemann appears to be guilty of the very modernizing Stendahl decries.

Kasemann (1971:70) argues that Stendahl's thesis "divides modern Protestantism inevitably and finally from the Reformers' interpretation of Paul and hence from the Reformation itself." To argue in this way seems only to beg the question, since this is exactly the point Stendahl hoped to prove.

Kasemann's critique, however, does challenge Stendahl at two points--he argues that the silence of the early church on justification was due to a lapse into mysticism and not, as Stendahl argues, because the Jewish-Gentile question was resolved (1971:73). Kasemann further asserts that Romans 9-11 is dominated by the doctrine of justification, and thus need not be viewed as an appendix to the epistle (1971:75).

Kasemann (1971:67) argues that "Paul's view of salvation history does not differ from Augustine's." Augustine was correct in interpreting Paul in terms of the battle between the civitas dei and the civitas terrena because Paul viewed salvation history as paradoxical. While Victory Day was just ahead, measured in human terms, salvation is fundamentally rooted in disaster (1971:67-68). It is significant to note, however, that Augustine has been

viewed by some scholars as an innovator or re-interpreter of New Testament thought. For example, Gerhard Lohfink (1984), in a monograph entitled Jesus and Community, finds a significant break in early Christian understanding in Augustine. The thesis of Lohfink's work is that Jesus came to call Israel into the people of God, the kingdom of God, and the church understood itself as an alternative society in the world until Augustine wrote City of God (1984:182). Thus, Lohfink and Stendahl, contra Kasemann, both see an individualizing of early church understandings in Augustine.

While Kasemann (1971:71) argues that Paul's doctrine of justification by faith is "not so historically conditioned as to be obsolete for today," the evidence suggests that the social significance of the doctrine has been lost. A recovery of the historical situation of the doctrine, with its social implications, would be a corrective to the individualistic theology of the Western church. I agree with Kasemann, however, that biblical issues need not be confined to their historical situation. Taken to the extreme, one could not make any connections between the past and the present. But Stendahl only asks that the biblical interpreter seek to understand what the words of Scripture meant to their original readers before asking what they mean to the modern reader.

Kasemann's second question is more to the point of this research. He asks:

does it [justification] as Protestants generally suppose, primarily take its bearings from the individual, so that it has to be supplemented or even replaced by a standpoint based on salvation history? (1971:71)

On this question Kasemann agrees with Stendahl.

Justification

neither can nor may continue to be interpreted in exclusively individual terms. . . . Stendahl and his friends are right in protesting against the individualist curtailment of the Christian message. (1971:74)

Again, he writes, "The Pauline doctrine of justification never took its bearings from the individual, although hardly anyone now realizes this" (1971:74). And again:

That God's grace and righteousness relate to the world and intend a new creation, not merely a number of believing individuals, seems to me an irrelinquishable truth if the Christian message is to be the foundation of anything more than merely private piety. (1971:78)

It is therefore evident that Ernst Kasemann did not challenge the social dimension of Stendahl's thesis, but supported it. That being the case, there is no need for a lengthy treatment of Stendahl's (1976:129-133) reply to Kasemann in Paul among Jews and Gentiles. Stendahl (1976:131) states that it is difficult to respond to Kasemann, since he did not attempt to show that Stendahl's exegetical calculations were wrong, opting instead to set up a dichotomy between salvation history and the doctrine of

justification. He further states that Kasemann's reasoning begs the question, as I noted above. Stendahl (1976:130-131) also laments that Kasemann limits his critique to Romans, since part of Stendahl's case is based on the fact that justification does not permeate Paul's writings--and thus is not suited to be the key to his theology.

Other Scholars' Views

Book reviews of Stendahl's (1976) Paul among Jews and Gentiles, which contains essays elaborating the thesis as well as a reprint of the original paper, are generally quite positive, though several reviewers argue that Stendahl overstates the case. But it is important to note that Stendahl changed his views between 1963 and 1976--in 1976 he believed that Jews could be saved by keeping the Torah (1976:vi,4). One reviewer (Peter Jones 1978:572-573) attacks him at this point. Margaret Thrall (1977:57-58) takes issue with Stendahl's contention that at Damascus Paul was called rather than converted. She writes, "The Damascus experience surely had a Christological content, and was in that sense a conversion" (1977:57). Stendahl (1976:8) had argued that Paul describes his conversion in the language of Isaiah 49 and Jeremiah 1 and was thus a call not a conversion. Here Stendahl is unduly influenced, I believe, by his desire to improve Jewish-Christian relations.

Stendahl's "Descriptive" Method

A discussion of Stendahl's critics is not complete without giving attention to the critiques of his method. His principal statement on method is his article (1962:418-432) in the Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, entitled "Biblical Theology, Contemporary." He responds to critics of his method in "Method in the Study of Biblical Theology" (1965:196-209). He (1962:418) argues that the religionsgeschichtliche Schule or "history of religions school" has demonstrated that a wide chasm exists between the thought patterns of biblical times and those of modern times. The task of biblical theology is descriptive. It should describe what a particular passage of the Bible meant to the original readers or hearers (Stendahl 1962:419). The question of how a passage of Scripture is normative for modern faith and life, "what does it mean?" is not the task of biblical theology, but of systematic theology.

[I]n the study of biblical theology we must make a definite distinction between the descriptive study of the actual theology and theologies to be found in the Bible, and any attempt at a normative and systematic theology which could be called "biblical." We would have to make very clear that the descriptive task has no claim or intention toward the normative. This is of utmost importance, since anything called "biblical" has a tendency to participate in the authority assigned to the Bible in Christian churches. It is the problem of authority which confuses the distinction between the descriptive "what it meant" and the normative-systematic "what it means." (1965:198-199).

One critic, Avery Dulles (1965:210), is uncomfortable with the distinction between what the Bible meant and what it means. He writes (1965:210), "What the text meant to the inspired author and as taken up in the inspired tradition, is still normative." This approach seems to deny the necessity of translating or interpreting the ancient meanings into modern theology. It fails to understand Stendahl, who seeks to preserve the authority of the Scriptures by seeking to understand them in their own terms before asking the question of modern meaning. "What it means" is always dependent upon "what it meant."

Dulles (1965:211) questions whether "the objective, non-normative approach to the Bible is theology." I believe he is correct in denying this, but the question is really only a matter of semantics. Descriptive biblical theology may not be termed theology in the strictest sense, but the need for descriptive work on the Scriptures before doing theology is thereby no less important.

A similar criticism has been raised more recently by Ben C. Ollenburger. He writes (1986:66-67), "Stendahl seems to hint that the product of the descriptions biblical theologians offer, the theologies to be found in the Bible, are not normative." Ollenburger also takes issue with the idea of restricting biblical theology to historical-critical descriptions:

The goal of Stendahl's argument seems to be that of making room for the work of

historical-critical description in biblical theology, and making biblical theology accountable to that kind of description. With that goal no one should find fault. . . . Had Stendahl claimed this much, and not more, there would be nothing controversial about his argument. But Stendahl goes on to make the much stronger claim . . . that historical-critical arguments exhaust the work of biblical theology. (1986:89-90)

The debate over the proper role of biblical theology does not effect Stendahl's argument on Paul's use of justification by faith. I have presented it here to argue that the debate over method does not discredit Stendahl's work on Paul. Ollenburger (1986:71) says as much when he writes that "There is much in Stendahl's own work that has contributed to theology, particularly his revision of previous theological uses of Paul."

Social Scientific Support for the Stendahl Thesis

Stendahl's thesis has been supported by the renewed dialogue between the social sciences and New Testament studies. Bruce J. Malina (1979), who holds doctoral degrees in both New Testament and cultural anthropology, has affirmed the Stendahl thesis in an article entitled, "The Individual and the Community--Personality in the Social World of Early Christianity." Malina writes:

A modern psychologist assessing the people in the New Testament . . . would categorize them as anti-introspective, or not at all

psychologically minded. . . . In this aspect of their culture, they were not like we are at all. Hence to infer psychological states of some person on the basis of our texts would be a highly questionable and anachronistic enterprise. Stendahl . . . is quite correct in dissociating Paul of Tarsus from the introspective conscience of the West. However the same would hold for anyone writing in the Hellenistic period of the Mediterranean world. The primary emphasis in the culture is on dyadic personality, on the individual as embedded in the group, on behavior as determined by significant others. (1979:131-132)

According to Malina, Mediterranean culture in New Testament times did not share our Western individualistic worldview. In fact, Western individualism is rather rare in the cultures of the world:

[Y]ou might conclude that the first-century Mediterranean person did not share or comprehend our idea of an "individual" at all. And I believe you would be right. What do we, in fact, mean by an "individual"? Clifford Geertz has observed that our conception of the individual as "a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment and action organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively both against other such wholes and against its social and natural background, is, however incorrigible it may seem to us, a rather peculiar idea within the context of the world's cultures." (1981:54)

In contrast to modern Western individualism, the first century Mediterranean world might be described by the term "dyadism." Malina (1979:127) defines the dyadic personality as "one that simply needs another continually in order to know who he or she is." Pivotal values for such persons

would be honor and shame, not guilt (1979:128). "Honor and shame are central to the social world of the Mediterranean, from antiquity to the present" (1979:128). Malina notes that the vocabulary of honor is extensive in the Bible, while the vocabulary of guilt is "rather rare, uninteriorized and at home in legal procedures" (1979:128).

Salvation is understood differently in an "honor and shame" culture:

[B]oth first-century Mediterranean and modern religions offer their adherents rescue from some overwhelmingly difficult situation (in Greek: soteria, salvation). But the subject of this rescue in the West is the individualistic achiever; the subject in ancient Mediterranean religion was the group-embedded person seeking to maintain the status quo. The personal obstacle to individual well-being in the West is something or someone thwarting competition and the greater achievement deriving from it; the social obstacle to some individual's well-being in the ancient Mediterranean was loss of honor. (Malina 1986:96)

Malina uses his insights from cultural anthropology to corroborate in The New Testament World the Stendahl thesis. Quoting Philippians 3:6, Malina writes that Paul claimed to be blameless according to the righteousness of the law:

[H]e believed that during his pre-Christian period of life, he actually observed all that was required of him by the Law. Hence it was not guilt or anxiety relative to the Law that led him to Christianity or maintained his Christian conversion. But how did he know he was blameless? Was it because his conscience did not bother him? Or was it because none of his significant others, none of his publics, accused him of

acting shamefully, dishonestly, or disobediently?
(1981:52-53)

Conclusions

I therefore conclude that Paul's understanding of justification by faith contained a social dimension. Krister Stendahl's thesis has not been seriously challenged, and it has been strengthened by social-scientific investigations into the New Testament. Paul's application of the doctrine appears to be as an answer to how Jewish and Gentile Christians can be united in the family of God in spite of the fact that Jewish Christians observe the Torah while Gentile Christians do not. Justification by faith is therefore the basis for Christian unity, or in terms of this dissertation, community. All Christians have this in common: they are sinners justified by faith in Christ, or saved by grace. Justification by faith makes Christian community possible and necessary. I must reiterate, however, that I do not deny the appropriateness of individual applications of the doctrine. I believe it is the answer to how a sinner can be made right with God. But individual interpretations do not exhaust the meaning of justification by faith.

My position differs with Stendahl's at one major point. While I believe that the doctrine is the means by which

unity can be obtained between Jewish and Gentile Christians, Stendahl's later views (1976) are that the doctrine is Paul's answer to how Jews and Christians can obtain unity. I cannot agree with Stendahl at this point, nor do I believe that Paul's Damascus road experience was a call to the Gentiles rather than a conversion, as Stendahl (1976:7) asserts. If Paul was not converted from one religion to another, then his life subsequent to Damascus makes no sense. He preached the faith he once tried to destroy (Galatians 1:23). While Paul believed that Jesus is the Jews' Messiah, and thus Christian faith is the fulfillment of Judaism, it is still far-fetched to claim that Paul was not converted from one religion to another. Jews and Christians are divided over the deity of Jesus. Surely this issue of deity constituted for Paul two different faiths.

The implications of this research are profound. If Paul found in justification by faith a means of uniting a divided church, a return to its biblical use could have social implications in this generation. There is an equalizing or leveling effect necessary for community and unity when all Christians obtain their standing before God by faith in Christ and his grace. It might also be true that the corporate witness of the church united by grace could be a powerful witness to the reality of salvation by grace in American culture. A fundamental axiom of missiology is that churches tend to be homogeneous. People

like to join churches without crossing social barriers (McGavran 1980:223-244). Without question, people do experience grace in such churches. However, when churches unite people who would otherwise be divided the corporate witness to the surrounding culture would seem to be more powerful. Jesus indicated that the church would witness by its oneness: "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). The prayer of Jesus for the church was "that they all may be one" (John 17:21). Among those who were brought together by Jesus were Matthew the tax collector (a Roman collaborator) and Simon the Zealot (a revolutionary)--two people who probably could not have been united by any other power.

One thing is clear; the experience of loneliness and alienation is not normative for the Christian. The fact that individual Christians can experience trauma or suffering with little concern from the local church is due in part to bad, individualistic theology. I recall the story of one young woman who went through a divorce without ever receiving a visit or a sympathetic ear from the pastor or anyone else from the church she attended. As the story was related to me, it was shared that apparently the pastor felt that she could avail herself of the church's programs if she wanted. She finally decided to change churches. When the church recovers the social dimension of

justification by faith, these negative experiences will be less likely to occur.

But bad theology may not be the only reason for the private suffering of many Christians. To what extent has the individualism of American culture effected the church and Christian experience? Does individualism present a challenge to the gospel of salvation by grace? These are the questions of Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

American Culture: Where Have the Grace
and Mystery Gone?

The church is called to proclaim the gospel. This much we know, and it seems so simple. Yet, the task is not as simple as it seems. What is the "gospel" we are to proclaim? This question is informed by three sub-questions which indicate the complexity of the simple question, what is the gospel?

First, our modern contemporaries do not agree on what the gospel is. Denominations differ in theology and doctrine. Jerry Falwell's gospel is different from that of Robert Schuller's. Whose "gospel" is the real gospel?

In addition to denominational differences, there is the question of history. In what ways is any modern understanding of "gospel" different from that of Jesus, Paul, or the early church? What has been the effect of 2,000 years of interpretation on our present understanding of "gospel?" Do modern men and women in the sanctuary pews hear essentially the same "gospel" their first-century brothers and sisters enjoyed?

Thirdly, there is the question of culture. How have the various cultural contexts in which the gospel has been heard reshaped the message itself? Is the American "gospel" different in any way from the Jewish gospel of Jesus, Peter,

and James, or the Greek gospel of Luke or John? One could of course argue that the "gospel" is so simple that any change in understanding due to different cultural contexts is insignificant. Or one could believe that the Holy Spirit guarantees that the essential, original good news of the early church will be protected from corruption and preserved from significant cultural aberrations.

The present chapter will investigate this third sub-question. Evidence will be presented which will suggest that the "gospel"--as typically understood by Americans, has been significantly reshaped by American individualism. Specifically, American individualism will be shown to distort the good news of salvation by grace.

Worldview Defines Reality

Anthropologists, in their study of other cultures, have documented that people's perceptions of reality differ from one another and sometimes rather dramatically. The way people view the world around them depends to a large extent on the underlying assumptions and values which are a part of their culture. These underlying assumptions, beliefs, and values are what anthropologists call a "worldview".

Worldview is a common mental map or way of looking at the world in order to determine what constitutes reality. W.T. Jones defines the worldview of any individual as:

a set of very wide-range vectors in that individual's belief space (a) that he learned early in life and that are not readily changed and (b) that have a determinate influence on much of his observable behavior, both verbal and non-verbal, but (c) that he seldom or never verbalizes in the referential mode, though (d) they are constantly conveyed by him in the expressive mode and as latent meanings. (1972:83)

Worldview formation occurs primarily in the first five years of life. For this reason it seems so natural, so much a part of human nature. It is therefore seldom questioned and remains resistant to change throughout one's lifetime, even when people are presented with conflicting data. Anthropologists believe that worldview is changed only by experience. To illustrate, Charles Kraft (1989:52) relates how his worldview changed as a result of attending a seminary class in which "we were seeing many healings each evening the class met!" He writes:

What I was experiencing was a classic "paradigm shift," a major change in perspective. I had opened myself up to the possibility of change by exposing myself to new experiences. Now in response to these new experiences, I was turning from skepticism to belief. (1989:53)

A worldview is comprised of "themes" (Opler 1946:198) or "core values" (Hsu 1972:217) which are limited in number, but lie at the heart of a culture.

The term "theme" is used . . . in a technical sense to denote a postulate or position, declared or implied, and usually controlling behavior or stimulating activity, which is tacitly approved or

openly promoted in a society. (Opler
1946:199)

Opler (1946:199) and Hsu (1972:217) both suggest that from these themes or core values are connected sub-themes or other values.

Individualism Is a Dominant Worldview Theme

Early Observers

Observers of the United States have noted the prominent place of individualism in the culture for many years. Among the first to identify the importance of individualism in American culture was the French aristocrat, Alexis de Tocqueville, who visited this country in 1831. Tocqueville predicted that individualism would eventually have a deleterious effect upon American society:

Individualism is a calm and considered feeling which disposes each citizen to isolate himself from the mass of his fellows and withdraw into the circle of family and friends; with this little society formed to his taste, he gladly leaves the greater society to look after itself. . . . Individualism at first only dams the spring of public virtues, but in the long run it attacks and destroys all the others too and finally merges in egoism. . . . Each man is thrown back on himself alone, and there is danger that he may be shut up in the solitude of his own heart. (cited in Bellah, et al. 1987:11-13)

For Tocqueville, individualism is the result of democracy in America. While he was generally highly favorable toward democracy, he made some comparisons with a traditional aristocratic state which inform this study:

Among aristocratic nations families maintain the same station for centuries and often live in the same place. So there is a sense in which all generations are contemporaneous. A man almost always knows about his ancestors and respects them; his imagination extends to his great-grandchildren, and he loves them. He freely does his duty by both ancestors and descendants and often sacrifices personal pleasures for the sake of beings who are no longer alive or are not yet born. Moreover, aristocratic institutions have the effect of linking each man closely with several of his fellows.

In democratic ages, on the contrary, the duties of each to all are much clearer but devoted service to any individual much rarer. The bonds of human affection are wider but more relaxed. . . . As social equality spreads there are more and more people though neither rich nor powerful enough to have specifically, much hold over others, have gained or kept enough wealth and enough understanding to look after their own needs. Such folk owe no man anything and hardly expect anything from anybody. They form the habit of thinking of themselves in isolation and imagine that their whole destiny is in their own hands. (cited in Bellah et al. 1987:11-13)

The well-known correlation between individualism in America and the American frontier was perhaps best stated by Frederick Jackson Turner in his 1893 essay entitled "The Significance of the Frontier in American History." He (1893:221) writes, "the frontier is productive of

individualism." While historians today might question whether the frontier produced individualism, most would grant that it provided a climate in which self-reliant individualism as a value could gain wide acceptance and become deeply ingrained in American culture.

Contemporary Evaluations

In their overview of anthropological studies on American culture, (which include works by Mead, Kluckhohn, Gorer, Ruesch and Bateson, Hsu, Spindler, and Gillin,) Spindler and Spindler list ten "characterizations" or "statements of belief" which could be considered American worldview themes:

Individualism The individual is the basic unit of society. Individuals are self-reliant and compete with other individuals for success.

Achievement orientation Everyone is concerned with achievement. Achievement, when recognized as success, is a measure of one's intrinsic worth.

Equality Though born with different attributes and abilities, everyone stands equal before the law and should have equal opportunity to achieve, utilizing one's individual ability and energy in a self-reliant manner.

Conformity Everyone is expected to conform to the norms of the community or group. Conformity and equality are closely related in that equal can be translated as "the same as."

Sociability Friendliness and the ability to get along well with others, to make friends easily, to be open to others are desirable qualities.

Honesty Keeping contracts is moral. It is also good for business. It is the "best policy."

Competence One should be able to do things well in order to succeed, but one should also be able to take care of oneself and those dependent upon one . . . to be independent.

Optimism The future is hopeful. Things will work out for the best. Improvement is possible, even inevitable if one works hard and is competent.

Work Work is good, not just a necessary evil. Idleness is bad and leads to dissolute behavior. Working hard is the key to success, even more than ability.

Authority Authority, from within a hierarchy or as represented by external power or even expertise, has negative value excepting under special conditions. (1983:58)

Note that individualism is the first item listed above. Robin M. Williams, Jr. (1960) concludes his sociological analysis of American society by noting that all American values point to the value of the individual personality. "The ethical, decision-making, unitary social personality is the object of this cult of the individual" (1960:463). One could therefore argue that individualism is the most deeply embedded of all American worldview themes. William A. Dyrness (1989:96) writes that "individualism has come to define American culture." Francis L. K. Hsu (1972:217), a Chinese anthropologist living in the United States, agrees. He argues that American culture is monothematic in its worldview, and that its single theme is self-reliance. In the Spindlers' belief statements above, self-reliance is included under the broader term of individualism.

The importance of individualism in American culture has become the focus of modern research. Foremost among recent studies is Robert Bellah et al. (1985) Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life. The authors argue that some forms of individualism have an erosive effect upon society because people are not willing to make

commitments for the common good. Watson, Morris, and Hood (1989) attempted to gather empirical evidence to substantiate the Bellah thesis. While they make no claim that their study alone establishes the negative consequences of individualism, the evidence does support it:

Individualism and its correlated Need-Determined Expression displayed characteristics that would work against the formation and maintenance of caring communities, since they were associated with the manipulateness of narcissistic Exploitativeness and Machiavellianism. (1989:168)

A Missiological Approach to Individualism

One important principle of missiology is that of cultural relativity or "cultural validity" (Kraft 1979:49). All cultures have good and bad elements in them, so that none can be said to be superior to another. Such an attitude is known as ethnocentrism. Missiologists believe in the "dignity of all cultures" (Dyrness 1989:8), and believe that every culture can receive the gospel (Dyrness 1989:20). At the School of World Mission at Asbury Theological Seminary one of the most often repeated phrases is "God is at work in every culture," which is an idea that expresses that all people or cultures retain something of the image of God. Jonah's mission to Ninevah in the Old Testament and Peter's mission to Cornelius in the New Testament (Acts 10) illustrate this principle. When a

Christian missionary encounters a given culture with the Christian faith for the first time, he or she can expect that the Holy Spirit has already been at work in that culture, so that one can look for cultural elements which form a common ground for communicating Christian faith.

The principle of cultural validity suggests that American culture, with its dominant worldview theme of self-reliant individualism, is not beyond the reach of God's grace. In fact, individualism has Christian underpinnings.

The Christian Beginnings of Individualism

In "A Modified View of Our Origins: The Christian Beginnings of Modern Individualism," Louis Dumont writes:

I submit that something of modern individualism is present with the first Christians and in the surrounding world, but that it is not exactly individualism as we know it. Actually, the old form and the new are separated by a transformation so radical and so complex that it took at least seventeen centuries of Christian history to be completed, if indeed it is not still going on in our times. (1982:1)

Bellah and co-authors (1985:27-28) describe four "strands" of American culture, and they imply four different kinds of individualism. The first of these is the "biblical tradition," characterized by Puritan leader John Winthrop.

[Winthrop] decried what he called "natural liberty," which is the freedom to do whatever one wants, evil as well as good. True freedom--what he called "moral" freedom, "in reference to the covenant between God and man"--is a liberty "to that only which is good, just, and honest." (1985:29)

The Enlightenment Roots of Individualism

Bellah and co-authors point out that modern individualism is primarily of the "expressive" or "utilitarian" variety, which takes its origins from the Enlightenment, especially the philosophy of John Locke:

The essence of the Lockean position is an almost ontological individualism. The individual is prior to society, which comes into existence only through the voluntary contract of individuals trying to maximize their own self-interest. (Bellah et al. 1985:143)

Dyrness (1989:88) notes that Locke was operating from a primarily Christian framework, so he "perhaps would have been surprised at the kind of influence [his] thinking had." But Newbigin writes,

From the point of view of the Bible, the freedom celebrated in the Enlightenment is the freedom offered by the serpent in Eden, the freedom to make one's own decision about what is good. (1986:141)

Dyrness (1989:96) concludes his historical survey of individualism by noting that the roots of American individualism are more secular than sacred. It is important to note, however, that there is a kind of individualism in the Scriptures which Christians can celebrate, namely, the dignity and worth of every individual. Jesus taught this truth through the attention he gave to individual outcasts such as blind Bartimaeus and the woman at the well. His

parable of the shepherd who left 99 sheep in the fold to look for the one who was lost is another obvious example.

The point of all this is to caution that this study should not be interpreted as an all-out attack on individualism, which has some aspects that Christians can celebrate, and which missiologists can view as redeemable. But as we have seen, modern American individualism is far more indebted to the Enlightenment than to Christianity. "It involves breaking free from family, community, and inherited ideas" (Bellah et al. 1985:82-83). Again, Bellah and co-authors write, "the meaning of one's life for most Americans is to become one's own person, almost to give birth to oneself" (1985:82). This is surely a long distance away from the value and worth of the individual taught in the biblical account of creation in God's image and demonstrated by Jesus in his sacrificial death.

The Reshaping of Salvation by Grace

That individualism is a powerful American worldview theme is beyond question. This study is an inquiry into the effect of individualism upon the church. Has individualism (especially as it has evolved from the Enlightenment) significantly reshaped the American understanding of the gospel? Is there a place for salvation by grace on the

mental map in which self-reliant individualism defines reality?

The hypothesis of this research is that Americans tend to understand salvation by grace in terms of personal achievement because of their self-reliant individualism. In effect, salvation by God becomes salvation by human achievement.

Before presenting scholars' views to support the hypothesis, it is necessary to present clearly the meaning of the term "salvation by grace" as used in this study. The New Testament writer who most clearly delineated the doctrine of salvation by grace was the apostle Paul. His most concise statement of the doctrine was his letter to the Galatians, of which William Barclay writes:

The basic fact behind the situation of this epistle is this--Paul's gospel was a gospel of free grace. He believed with all his heart that nothing a man could do could ever win the favour of God. He believed passionately that no one could ever earn the love of God. He therefore believed that all that was left for a man to do was to fling himself on the love and mercy of God in one great act of faith. He believed that all that a man could do was to take in wondering gratitude what God offers; and that the important thing was not what we could do for ourselves but what God had done for us. It was this gospel of the free grace of God that Paul had preached. (1958:9)

Salvation by grace and self-reliant individualism are incompatible. When Americans hear the message of God-

reliance, is it reshaped by their self-reliant worldview? I believe that the answer to the above question is "yes," and I present the remainder of this chapter as evidence to support that claim.

The Church Reflects American Cultural Values

Unsecular America, edited by Richard Neuhaus (1986), is a collection of the papers read and the discussion which followed at a conference for Christian scholars. A paper by Everett Ladd (14-30) is entitled, "Secular and Religious America," in which the author presents social-scientific evidence that the United States is the most religious of all Western societies. Peter Berger asks:

If you take North American and West European societies--except for Ireland--the United States is absolutely by itself in religiosity. . . . Why are Americans so different from Swedes? (Neuhaus 1986:85)

George Marsden presents this explanation:

One person's religion is another person's secularism. As you know, the common comment on fundamentalism is that it is just secularism in disguise. It is a way of endorsing a materialistic, self-centered lifestyle. And that's something that could be said about a lot of American Christianity. . . . Sometimes the way that secularization advances is by the advance of religion. That is, from a traditional Christian perspective what happens is that there is a baptizing of worldly practice. From the perspective of traditional Christianity, the advance of religion might be a dangerous thing, and that would include civil religion. . . . It might be helpful in survey research on religion to have a category of "folk religion" in talking about American religion--as distinguished from

traditional religion. When you're doing a survey, it's that "folk religion" that tends to come out--a sincerely but shallowly held religiousness. Maybe that's what's showing up on the surveys. There might be a lot of religion around, but a decline in traditional religion. (Neuhaus 1986:100)

Benestad adds:

Tocqueville said that in no country in the civilized world is less attention paid to philosophy than in the United States. It is an interesting statement to read to students and ask them if they think that's a compliment or an insult. They're not quite sure. It may have something to do with the thinness of our religion. We have a problem injecting mind into our religion. It tends to get modified by current affairs. Today our religion gets transmogrified into politics or psychology, or something else. (Neuhaus 1986:77)

Tony Campolo echoes a similar theme. In his book, Partly Right, Campolo (1985:61) writes, "American Protestant churches often have been the propagators of American social values rather than advocates of biblical values." In his article, "The Demise of Evangelicalism," Campolo (1987:20) is pessimistic about the future of the evangelical church in America because, among other reasons, it has become too much like the culture in which and to which it seeks to minister:

let us be honest enough to say that biblical Christianity has almost disappeared from the North American scene. Americans have been seduced into a glitzy, comfortable, entertaining, politically conservative, theologically naive, and socially wholesome form of religiosity, which is in many ways a denial of the Christianity initiated by Jesus Christ. (1987:18)

If the church is in fact merely reflecting American values, one should not be surprised if the message of salvation by grace is mixed with a good dose of self-reliant individualism.

The enormous power of individualism as a worldview theme to shape American belief and doctrine can be readily appreciated from the following observation by Campolo:

With the middle class, sin is always an individual matter and the world might be set right if enough individuals would accept Jesus as their personal Savior. When theologians talk about corporate guilt or the sinful nature of social systems, the members of the middle class do not so much reject their messages as find them incomprehensible. For them, everything is personal and individualistic. (1985:41)

When theology challenges theology, it is either accepted or rejected. But when theology challenges a worldview, it is incomprehensible.

The Church Is a Source of Individualism

Robert Bellah and his colleagues relate that the church is a major source of individualism in America (Bellah et al. 1985:245). Following Ernst Troeltsch's two conceptions of the religious community—"church" and "sect," the authors (1985:244) state that the sect type "has in many ways been the dominant mode of American Christianity." In the sect type religious community, the church is viewed as "primarily a voluntary association of believers," and "the individual has a certain priority over the church." Thus, the sect

type church, which "includes the Protestant denominations with the largest numbers," "are a major source of our individualism and of the pervasive American idea that all social groups are fragile and in need of constant energetic effort to maintain them" (1985:145).

The findings of Bellah et al. concerning the church as a source of individualism are corroborated by scholars whose research has revealed that some churches create insecurity in their members. Eric J. Cohen (1982:5) notes that there are "a substantial number of Christians today that are entrapped in a frantic and neurotic struggle to fully appropriate the grace and power of God into their lives." This neurosis is induced by paradoxical theological imperatives or "double binds" in which a correct response is demanded but no correct response is possible and there is no opportunity to reflect on the paradoxical communication (1982:7). Examples of a theological double bind are "die in order to live" and "be last in order to be first" (1982:10). Other double binds are of the "be spontaneous" variety. Christians "should be happy," "should not be angry," "should not feel depressed" (1982:10). Cohen suggests that prolonged entrapment in theological double binds will produce an "induced Christian neurosis":

The symptoms manifested can range from depression, anxiety, excessive guilt feelings, stress related somatic problems (extreme muscle tension, headaches, high blood pressure, stomach disorders, etc.), to

more serious disorientations and psychotic reactions. (1982:11)

While Cohen does not cite studies concerning the prevalence of this syndrome, he believes that the incidence of induced Christian neurosis is quite high (1982:11).

Mebane and Ridley (1988) also suggest that the church creates insecurity. In "The Role-Sending of Perfectionism: Overcoming Counterfeit Spirituality," the authors write (1988:335) that "an unrealistic and unbiblical message of how to live the 'Christian life' is sent in the church," chiefly through the faulty role-sending of the pastor:

If pastors intend for their behavior to be modeled, it is understandable that only their best behaviors and accomplishments are openly displayed. The outcome is that pastoral perfection is modeled to imperfect parishioners. The potent message sent is "you need to be a perfect Christian. . . ." A notorious social face in the church is the need to appear perfect. (1988:335)

The authors make two recommendations to cure perfectionism in the church. The first is to "embrace valid theology":

Invalid theology is a major source of the problem. Role-sending in many churches tends only to emphasize behavioral expectations. Conspicuously absent in the message, however, is an emphasis on grace and forgiveness. (1988:337)

The second recommendation is for pastors to change their role-sending messages:

Realistically, pastors should model their full humanity with all its imperfections and

failures as well as accomplishments humbly achieved through God's grace. Imperfection must be openly acknowledged and accepted. Authenticity and honesty must be modeled along with healthy striving toward self-improvement. (1988:338)

Insecurity, which is one of the negative consequences of individualism, can be minimized in the church if pastors are willing both to teach and to model a life of forgiveness and grace. Since a worldview is changed by experience, I contend that teaching without modeling is ineffective in reducing perfectionism and insecurity in the congregation.

Perhaps pastors are learning to be more open with their congregations. Snyder and Runyon (1986:88) suggest that pastors may be moving away from authoritarian leadership to a more servant leadership style, but are uncertain that this trend will continue in the United States. The authors' survey suggests that the trend toward pastors as equippers and disciplers is more popular in the international church than the churches of the United States and Europe (1986:81).

The Church Communicates a Moralistic Message

Further evidence that self-reliant individualism distorts the American understanding of grace is the moralistic message communicated from American pulpits. J. Russell Hale's (1980:106) study of the unchurched found that many unchurched people perceive the churches to be primarily populated by Pharisees. This group of unchurched people, which Hale (1980:106) labels "the publicans," is "by far the

largest group of the unchurched." Hale's summation of his research focuses on the large group of unchurched people who perceive the message coming from American pulpits as bad news:

Even the most cursory survey of the anecdotal material of this report is evidence that hosts of unchurched people have been hearing more "bad news" than "good news" from the churches and pulpits they have known. Sectarian versions of the Christian message have come across to many who are now outsiders as overloaded with law, moralism, judgment, and rejection. Many have simply never heard of a loving God who accepts people while they are yet sinners. One may question whether those communions that hold to doctrines of perfection and holiness have intentionally communicated their message in the negative way in which it has been heard. But that is the way the message has been perceived and understood. (1980:184)

A moralistic message is consistent with a self-reliant worldview. When the "good news" of salvation by grace (God) through faith in Christ is filtered through the lens of self-reliant individualism, it can be perceived as the "bad news" of salvation by human effort and morality. Self-reliant individuals depend upon themselves, and this independence is not necessarily absent in spiritual matters. When it is remembered that the self-reliant worldview shapes the communicator of the "good news" as well as the receiver, the potential for "bad news" becomes clear.

Moralism has a long history in the church. The church has been inclined to reduce Christianity to moralism since

the end of the second century (Ellul 1986:73). Faced with mass conversions to Christianity, church leaders opted to bring these masses into the church,

but with no hope that these thousands of people can live as if they were in the kingdom of God. The presupposition, then, is that they will have to be trained and their manner of life controlled. Christianity thus becomes morality, the very opposite of what was intended by Jesus and by revelation in Israel. And at every point this morality more or less corresponds to the society of the day, not to what might be taken, for example, from the texts in Paul. (Ellul 1986:72)

The prominence of rules and works in Christian theology was challenged by the Reformation, but after the first generation of Reformers had rediscovered Christian freedom, there was a return to moral rigidity, especially with Calvin (Ellul 1986:73). "Morality again achieved domination over 'life in Christ'" (Ellul 1986:73).

Moralism has been dominant in American religion from our earliest days. The frontier in America generally had a shortage of clergy, so much of religious training was left to lay people:

The churches were run by lay people, not by the clergy. So they stressed morals and behavior rather than theology and doctrine. They moved away from the Augustinian tradition of close and detailed definition of dogma and toward the alternative proposed by Erasmus, that religion should define as little as possible and concentrate on propagating the spirit of Christian fellowship. (Neuhaus 1986:3)

The religious groups which grew the fastest from 1776 to 1850, the Baptists and Methodists, had poorly educated clergy.

The 1853 Baptist Almanac estimated that in 1823 only about 100 of the 2,000 Baptist clergy had been "liberally educated," and the famous Methodist itinerant Peter Cartwright estimated that at the General Conference of 1844 fewer than 50 (of approximately 4,282 traveling ministers) "had anything more than a common English education [grade school], and scores of them not that." (Finke and Stark 1989:35)

While Methodist circuit riders coordinated the activities of the local church, the day-to-day functions of the church were carried on by the locals (Finke and Stark 1989:37). Thus, the story of the Christianizing of America contains a dominant role by laity and uneducated clergy who emphasized morals, behavior, and experience rather than careful doctrinal clarity.

A discussion of morality in American religion is not complete without considering the role of American civil religion upon the American understanding of what constitutes Christianity. Civil religion in the United States has been a substitute for a state church; the function of both to provide a symbolic center to hold the citizens together with a sense of oneness and loyalty to the nation (Gaustad 1987:59). It has always been more prominent when the need for national unity was acute.

For the enlightened founders of the United States, "Reason . . . counted more than faith, and morals more than grace. This was the chief idea of the Enlightenment in Europe and America alike" (Marty 1984:156). Among the first of the statesman founders to call for a new religion was Benjamin Franklin, who in 1749 published his Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Philadelphia, which defended "the Necessity of a Publick Religion" (cited in Marty 1984:155).

Public religion to Franklin meant not the end of sects but of sectarianism, not the end of their freedoms but the increase of their duty to produce a common morality. (Marty 1984:157)

When pressed about his own religious beliefs, Franklin expressed doubts about the divinity of Jesus but agreed that Jesus did produce the best system of morals and religion the world had ever seen or was likely to see (Marty 1984:157).

Thus, the founding fathers rejected traditional Christianity but saw the need for a public religion, consisting of what Franklin called "the essentials of every religion" (in Marty 1984:157), to provide the moral consensus to support public order and to hold the nation together.

Following the formative years of the United States, civil religion again became prominent in the war between the states. Indeed, the President who most effectively promoted American civil religion was Lincoln, who saw the nation

itself as a kind of uncanonical church (Marty 1984:221). For Lincoln, the survival of the Union was almost an article of faith.

Following World War II "a public weary of depression, war and division settled down with the assurances of their leader" (Marty 1984:405). President Eisenhower insisted that recognition of the Supreme Being was the first and most basic expression of Americanism. "Without God, there could be no American form of government, nor an American way of life" (cited in Marty 1984:405). The Republican National Committee in 1955 called the president "the spiritual leader of our times" (cited in Marty 1984:405). In 1948 Eisenhower had announced, "I am the most intensely religious man I know"--and then hastened to add that he did not adhere to any sect: "I believe in democracy" (cited in Marty 1984:405). But Will Herberg, reflecting on the Eisenhower era, declares that

American Way of Life religion was idolatry. Civic religion always meant making an idol out of the society or culture it reflected and supported. Such faith was a religion of ego and of humans, not of God; a religion of my national tribe and not of the whole human family, of my thirst for self-identification and not the service of others. The 'unknown God' of the nation was faith itself; no one . . . stated this more clearly . . . than President Eisenhower. (cited in Marty 1984:426)

"Most Americans," writes Tony Campolo (1985:61), "have been seduced into a religion of Americanism which

increasingly is confused with and substituted for evangelical Christianity." It is clear that American civil religion, which reduces Christianity to a moralism by seeking to find a moral consensus in all religions, has significantly contributed to the American understanding of the Christian faith. As a moralism it is compatible with the worldview of self-reliant individualism, and it contributes to the understanding that salvation is the result of human effort rather than the gift of God.

Moralistic messages are often heard from American pulpits. At least that is the belief of a number of contemporary observers of religion in America. J. Russell Hale's interviews with the unchurched have already been presented. Robert Bellah and co-authors (1985:245) note that in the sect type church, "There is a tendency for grace to be overshadowed by 'the law of Christ' and for the sacrament to be less central than a moralism that verges on legalism."

Perhaps the most vitriolic critic of the American church and its moralistic message is Anthony Campolo:

I am amazed at how many people think they have heard the good news about God when all they have heard is the bad news about themselves. I am intrigued with the way so many are attracted to preachers who hold up the worthlessness of the congregation while giving little time or effort to holding up the beauty of Christ and declaring the good news that Christ has for us all.

Those who understand that the tendency of most people is to view themselves as worms and dung should not be surprised that

preachers who articulate these images of human nature gain large audiences. Those people are simply finding a resolution of their dual natures by affirming their sinfulness while forgetting their divinity. They seem willing to ignore the fact that the word "gospel" means "good news." They have learned to revel in the bad news about themselves and have made this bad news the essence of their religious faith. (1985:118)

I conclude this discussion of moralism with the observation of Jacques Ellul (1986:69), "In the minds of most of our contemporaries, Christianity primarily means morality." This is exactly the message the self-reliant individualist expects to receive from the church. With this view of reality, the message of free salvation offered by God through faith in Christ is incomprehensible.

The Church Has Accommodated to Modernity

My final argument for the reshaping of salvation by grace in America is the negative influence of modernity, the bedfellow of individualism. The relationship between individualism and modernity can be easily demonstrated.

The liberation of modernity has been, above all, that of the individual. Modern social structures have provided the context for the socialization of highly individuated persons. Concomitantly, modern society has given birth to ideologies and ethical systems of intense individualism. Indeed, it has been suggested that the theme of individual autonomy is perhaps the most important theme in the world view of modernity. (Berger et al. 1973:196)

Berger, Berger, and Kellner (1973:213) write, "The concept

of the naked self, beyond institutions and roles, as the ens realissimum of human being, is at the very heart of modernity."

Boston Globe columnist Ellen Goodman (1987) writes of a crisis a woman had when she went to her local mega-drugstore and found that the store was out of the shampoo she normally buys. Thus, she was "tossed willy-nilly into the chaos of the modern day world of shampoos." The woman was faced with an array of choices:

What did she want after all? Which of the three dozen options lined up before her would make the dead follicles that grow out of her busy head look alive? A moisturizing formula? A body-building protein? A mysterious chemical soup of Elastin? Collagen? Keratin? Balsam? (1987:A7)

Faced with this "decision-making marathon," this "information glut," the woman eventually bolted from the store without buying anything. Goodman noted that "the drift of all this is toward an excessive self-absorption" (1987:A7).

The word "choice" is central to the modern vision (Gaede 1985:42), and choice begets self-awareness. "By emphasizing the importance of choice . . . modernity creates a climate in which the individual's wishes become the primary focus of attention" (Gaede 1985:135).

According to theologian Thomas Oden (1990:77), one of the themes of modernity is the idolatry of self. Oden remarks:

Narcissism is a key of modernity. Myself becomes the central project of moral interest; self-enjoyment and self-development become the central goals. This is closely related to radical individualism. (1990:79)

Gaede (1985:135) writes, "Modernity is the ideal breeding ground for individualism."

Modernity shapes one's vision of reality, one's worldview. It dichotomizes reality between the public and the private, and privatizes religion (Berger et al. 1973:80). In modern societies religious definitions of reality lose their quality of certainty and become matters of choice (Berger et al. 1973:80). Modernity, with its concomitant pluralization, has a secularizing effect. Pluralization weakens the hold of institutions and traditions, including religion, on society and the individual (Berger et al. 1973:80). Modernity causes a loss of the transcendent in a culture, the loss of mystery (Berger et al. 1973:82).

What is the relationship between modernity and salvation by grace? In modern societies, "Faith is no longer socially given but must be individually achieved" (Berger et al. 1973:81). Secularization, the loss of transcendence, suggests that humans are alone in the cosmos, or in Berger and co-authors' word, "homeless." As faith in God becomes more difficult salvation by God becomes meaningless.

The church has not fared well against the challenge of modernity. Hunter notes that the evangelical church has, in some measure, lost a sense of the transcendent.

The rationalization of the conversion experience and all other dimensions of Evangelical spirituality has had the effect of harnessing the ecstatic, taming the unpredictable, and pacifying the "unruly" qualities of Evangelical faith. When the truly charismatic areas of religious experience are rigorously defined, systematized, and cataloged, the religion is divested of a non-empirical energy and force necessary to sustain it over time. In great measure this describes the present situation of American Evangelicalism. Spiritual experience has largely become domesticated as a result of the rationalization of spirituality. (1983:100)

Hunter is not alone in this analysis of American evangelicalism. Webber (1985:8) writes that a number of evangelical Christians have joined more liturgical churches, apparently in search of a sense of the transcendent in worship. Snyder and Runyon (1986:36), in their work on ten trends that will effect the church, refer to the Webber observation and state that "a movement is underway."

I believe modernity is not only an evangelical problem; mainline churches have been seduced as well. Hauerwas and Willimon write:

The seminaries have produced clergy who are agents of modernity, experts in the art of congregational adaptation to the cultural status quo, enlightened facilitators whose years of education have trained them to enable believers to detach themselves from the insights, habits, stories, and

structures that make the church the church.
(1989:116)

Laurence Wagley, professor of preaching and worship at Saint Paul School of Theology, laments that

Increasingly the churches are adopting the television model [of worship]: a setting that provides a spectacle, music as performance, and preaching as theatrics. The public face of worship is a media face, slick and professional, that can compete with other forms of entertainment. (1990:4)

When a United Methodist seminary professor laments that too often worship has degenerated into entertainment it is further evidence that the mainline churches are feeling the effects of modernity too.

The Case for Community

Hauerwas and Willimon (1989:170) conclude their assessment of the church in American culture by calling for the church to form a community, "a colony of resident aliens which is so shaped by our convictions that no one even has to ask what we mean by confessing belief in God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." The authors believe that the church has lost its integrity and that the church's life together mocks its words (1989:144,171).

Christian community is of vital importance in American culture. Only through the experience of love and acceptance in the church will the light of the grace of God begin to

break on the American consciousness. Salvation by grace is communicated by communities of faith that demonstrate the power of grace to build community. Christian community witnesses to the power of God to unite diverse people around the cross in forgiveness and love. Since no two people are alike, every Christian community witnesses to the power of salvation by grace in a measure. It would seem, however, that the greater the diversity of people uniting around the cross the more powerful the witness to salvation by grace. Given the central place of individualism in the American worldview, it is imperative that the church understands itself primarily as a community of believers whose calling is to be to others what Christ has been to them. Grace is mediated by believers who are willing to be accepting of others and who bridge the gaps that divide them from others. Such bridging challenges the worldview assumption of the self-reliant individualist that one is on one's own.

The problem of communicating salvation by grace in a culture with a worldview dominated by self-reliant individualism raises the question of how salvation by grace is apprehended in other cultures. One would expect to find in cultures with worldview assumptions not dominated by self-reliant individualism, such as certain tribal societies of Africa and Melanesia, that people apprehend salvation by grace more readily. This may be the case in primal societies with a more communal worldview where people have

come to faith in Christ as groups and Christianity has had a transforming effect on their society. However, whether these societies really do understand salvation by grace better than North Americans is unknown.

While we do not have a clear answer to the above question, it can be demonstrated that grace can be apprehended through community experiences in American culture.

Alcoholics Anonymous Demonstrates Community

I believe the church could learn much about community and grace by studying Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.). This group was originally associated with the Oxford Group, a small Christian movement dedicated to reviving primitive Christianity (Kurtz 1979:9). The influence of Christianity on the twelve steps of Alcoholics Anonymous is evident:

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol--that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove all our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when

- we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
 12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of those steps we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs. (Alcoholics Anonymous 1939:71-72)

While Alcoholics Anonymous was indebted to Christianity from its inception, it achieved a sense of fellowship or community absent in many American churches.

How does A.A. demonstrate community? Note that there are no "I's" or "my's" in the twelve steps; rather "we" and "us." The most outstanding quality of A.A. groups which engenders a sense of community is the maintenance of equality among all the members, indeed, among all alcoholics. In contrast to the division that is felt between the church and the unchurched, there is no such division among A.A. adherents and those who do not attend A.A. meetings. That is, those who have achieved sobriety do not try to convert or persuade another alcoholic to sobriety, they merely tell their own stories for the purpose of maintaining their own sobriety. This is vividly illustrated in co-founder Bill Wilson's need to talk to another alcoholic shortly after attaining sobriety. He knew instinctively that he would have to find another alcoholic or he would succumb to the temptation of the bar (Kurtz 1979:27). When Wilson found another alcoholic,

[he] didn't ask questions and preach; he offered no "you must's" or even "let's us's." He had simply told the dreary but fascinating facts about himself, about his own drinking. And now, as Wilson moved to stand up to end the conversation, he was actually thanking Dr. Smith for listening. "I called Henrietta because I needed another alcoholic. I needed you, Bob, probably a lot more that you'll ever need me. So, thanks a lot for hearing me out. I know now that I'm not going to take a drink, and I'm grateful to you." (Kurtz 1979:29)

Bill D. reflected on his attitude about being approached by a couple of alcoholics:

All the other people that had talked to me wanted to help me, and my pride prevented me from listening to them, and caused only resentment on my part, but I felt as if I would be a real stinker if I did not listen to a couple of fellows for a short time, if that would cure them. (Kurtz 1979:38)

There is therefore a wonderful leveling in A.A., for no person is really above another and so in a position to help another. This gives dignity to every alcoholic, even those who are outsiders to A.A. This equal status is the chief reason for the experience of community typical of A.A. groups.

Further evidence of this equality is the way each group member addresses the group in A.A. meetings, "My name is _____, and I'm an alcoholic." Another manifestation of this equality is the acknowledgement that the effectiveness of the movement is not based on personal charisma or talent. Rather, power emerges from weakness (Kurtz 1979:4,61). As

alcoholics share in brutal honesty their torment while drinking, they witness to "the healing potency of the shared honesty of mutual vulnerability openly acknowledged" (Kurtz 1979:61). In the language of the church, A.A. is a fellowship of sinners. The first of the twelve steps is the admission of powerlessness, that one's life is out of control. Bill Wilson (Kurtz 1979:61) writes, "You must always remember that 'hitting bottom' is the essence of getting hold of A.A.--really."

It is also significant that professionalism is forbidden in A.A., so that no one is ever paid for helping another alcoholic (Kurtz 1979:49). There exists no division between clergy and laity. Public speakers from A.A. are required to remain anonymous to keep them from becoming prideful, since the proud might subsequently fall and discredit the group (Kurtz 1979:51).

The humility of the individual members of A.A. is shared by the organization as a whole.¹ A.A. has shied away from organization, intuitively realizing that organizing with paid staff would destroy the precious equality and unity of the fellowship (Alcoholics Anonymous [A.A.] 1953:170-175). "We ought never to name boards to govern us" (A.A. 1953:120). In the early days the group discovered that money would destroy the fellowship when one man asked, "Wouldn't money destroy this thing?" (Kurtz 1979:66). The humility of the movement is reflected in "the principle of

corporate poverty" (A.A. 1953:114) which began when A.A. trustees rejected a \$10,000 gift and made public a policy to reject all future donations from outside the fellowship.

I believe that the absence of this leveling or equal humble status was the major reason for the movement's early separation from the Oxford Group. Kurtz (1979:16) writes that Bill Wilson had a "self-conscious wariness of 'religion' that was so deeply to infuse the program and fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous." The reason for this "wariness" is revealed in a letter Wilson wrote to a close friend: "The thing that still irks me about all organized religion is their claim how confoundedly right all of them are" (Kurtz 1979:52). In terms of this study, perhaps Wilson was saying that there was too much self-righteousness in the church, or not enough grace in the church. Grace humbles a person. Without the humble confession that salvation for everyone depends on the grace of God believers are divided from other believers and community is destroyed. I believe the main reason Wilson disassociated with the Oxford Group was the threat the Christian group posed to the fellowship or community of the alcoholics (see Kurtz 1979:37-82).

I leave for the reader to evaluate for herself or himself whether the church enjoys an all-at-the-same-humble-level experience similar to the A.A. fellowship. Are the unchurched dignified by evangelistic witness in a manner

similar to the alcoholic's experience when approached by other alcoholics who have to tell their story in order to keep sober? Or are "sinners" put-off by the "righteous"? Does the church organize itself and operate in such a way that one gets the sense that this is a fellowship of sinners? One of my earliest and most vivid memories upon entering a new denomination was the sight of a district superintendent on his knees with open hands to receive the Eucharist. Such humility is beautiful but often missing among church leaders.

Alcoholics Anonymous Communicates Grace

In addition to the potential for the church to learn about community from Alcoholics Anonymous, the church could also learn about grace. Note that the first of the twelve steps is an admission that one's life is out of control. Step one is a frontal attack on self-reliance. "Hitting bottom" is the essence of A.A. Step two is the belief in a "Power greater than ourselves." Taken as a whole, the twelve steps are about sin and salvation, human powerlessness and God's power, human hopelessness and the grace of a loving God.

While there is broad latitude on the concept of God in A.A., the movement certainly contains those who stress the supernatural. Lois Wilson, wife of co-founder Bill Wilson, says, "I don't know why people keep talking about the spiritual part of our program. The twelve steps are

spiritual. That's what they are" (Klaas 1982:12). Klaas (1982:19) writes, "Through the twelve steps you will experience God. God will be proven at last." Again, Klaas (1982:29) writes, "The Power greater than ourselves is not a man-made Power. It is not a rational Power. It is a supernatural Power greater than ourselves." Klaas asserts (1982:29) that, "People diagnosed with terminal cancer, AIDS and other deadly diseases survive with the Steps." The reader will note here an attack on modernity with its attendant absence of transcendence. Transcendence is necessary for grace to be credible. There can be no grace without God to give it.

It is significant that Kurtz's (1979) Harvard dissertation on the history of A.A. is entitled, Not-God: A History of Alcoholics Anonymous. The term "not-God" sums up Kurtz's understanding of the genius of the movement. The focus of A.A. is that the individual is not God but that God and grace can be found in the fellowship of other alcoholics.

Another way that A.A. communicates grace is by its refusal to take authority over its constituents. "Great suffering and great love are A.A.'s disciplinarians; we have no others" (Alcoholics Anonymous 1957:120). The connection between this policy and Christian grace/law is obvious. I further note that when love is the rule the organization places confidence in its constituents.

The absence of strictness makes one wonder about the success of A.A., since Kelley observes that strictness and demand are necessary for churches to provide meaning to their constituents:

The quality that enables religious meanings to take hold is not their rationality, their logic, their surface credibility, but rather the demand they make upon their adherents and the degree to which that demand is met by commitment. (1977:53)

The answer is clearly that the demands of "great suffering and great love" are greater than the demands of strict rules. Accordingly, churches can provide meaning when they communicate the demand of grace, which is more awesome than law.

Nace (1987:242), in his discussion of why A.A. works, writes, "The first impression of why A.A. is effective is that of unconditional acceptance." That is grace. Grace is why A.A. works. "Emphasis is placed not on what the alcoholic should or should not do, but rather on a sharing of what A.A. has found helpful" (Nace 1987:242). Note the contrast here between "should" (moralism) and "sharing" (good news).

People are finding grace and power for their lives through the A.A. community experience:

To be an alcoholic within Alcoholics Anonymous . . . implies . . . affirmation of one's connectedness with other alcoholics. It is this connection that historically has provided for hundreds of thousands of people a way out of active alcoholism and the path

into a life of health, happiness, and wholeness. (Kurtz 1979:4)

The steps have been modified for use by other people in need. Millions of people are involved with the twelve steps through membership in Smokers Anonymous, Overeaters Anonymous, Schizophrenics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, Emotions Anonymous, Compulsive Sexuals Anonymous, Parents Anonymous, Mistresses Anonymous, Debtors Anonymous, and other twelve step groups (Klaas 1982:156).

Conclusion

To summarize what we have discovered, we have seen that worldview defines reality, and that individualism is a dominant American worldview theme. Unfortunately, American individualism takes its cues more from the Enlightenment than from Christianity. I believe this "definer of reality" has significantly reshaped the American understanding of salvation by grace. The evidence strongly suggests that the church reflects American cultural values, and that it is a source of individualism and insecurity. Further, the church communicates a moralistic message and accommodates to modernity, which are other cultural pressures. I have argued that the church needs to recover a sense of community, and have suggested Alcoholics Anonymous as a possible model.

Grace is the basis of Christian community. Community is the evidence of grace, just as the fruit of a tree is the evidence of life. I believe people find grace in community more readily than by themselves, and I have field tested this belief. The results of this research are the subject of the next chapter.

Note

1. While my research focuses on community through small groups, it is clear that the national organization of A.A. promotes the sense of community experienced in the local groups. Therefore I conclude that church organization above and beyond the local church can contribute to or subtract from the constituents' experience of community. In other words, denominational structures can promote the experience of community at the local church level. They can also thwart it.

CHAPTER 5
Research Findings: Grace Is Discovered
in Small Groups

This dissertation is an investigation into the question of how American worldview themes impact a person's understanding of salvation by grace. The field research was designed to test whether a person's understanding of salvation by grace would increase through involvement in a small-group community experience. Could volunteers in a community-building exercise experience a sense of community that would at least temporarily abate their individualistic worldview? And if that were achieved, would the participants' understanding of salvation by grace increase? To find out, I asked for volunteers from among the three United Methodist churches that I pastor to participate in one of two 12-week Bible studies designed to build community.

Some Limitations of this Research Design

Despite the fact that we know that one's worldview influences one's theology, a cause-effect relationship between worldview and theology is difficult, if not impossible, to prove empirically. If understandings of salvation by grace increase during a 12-week Bible study

while individualism scores decrease, that would not necessarily mean that the increase in grace scores was determined or caused by the decrease in individualism scores. Other factors could be involved. While an effort was made to manipulate only one variable at a time (community experience), other variables such as chance, history, honesty and mood of the volunteer at the time of measurement, also come into play.

The sample is admittedly small. Subsequent research with a larger ecumenical sample over a wide geographical area might prove insightful. I am aware of the dangers of drawing large generalized conclusions from a small sample. The research is therefore intended to be exploratory in nature rather than conclusive.

The use of volunteers adds a variable to the research. Volunteers are perhaps more open to change than those who decline to volunteer. They are probably even more open to the idea of grace. Those whose salvation rests on a legalistic or self-righteous foundation may be defensive and thus less open to the threat of self-disclosure which small groups often entail. In contrast, for people who perceive that salvation depends on God's work in their lives rather than on their own perfection, they might be more self-assured and thus less threatened by small group interaction.

I have attempted to limit the negative consequences of using volunteers through the use of a pre-test post-test

research design. As it turned out, no participant achieved a maximum or minimum score on the Strommen (1990) measures, nor a maximum score on the individualism measure, though there was one minimum score. This means that there was still room for change, regardless of the degree of grace understanding or individualism that each volunteer had as they began the experiment.

The individualism instrument (Bales and Couch 1970) was included in this study to test whether a sense of community actually did occur in the small groups. Some might question the adequacy of the individualism instrument for this purpose, since it is not really a community-measuring instrument. I have measured community by asking for disagreement with individualism statements rather than agreement with community statements. I believe either approach is valid. A decrease in the individualism score from pre-test to post-test in seven out of ten participants makes it reasonable, if not conclusive, that some sort of community has taken place.

The Field Setting

The three churches of the Guilford United Methodist Charge are located on the eastern shore of Virginia and are a part of the Eastern Shore District of the Virginia Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church. They are rural

and known across the district as theologically conservative. They are primarily blue collar, interspersed with a few retired business people and professionals who work for NASA or teach school. The average attendance of morning worship at the three churches of the Guilford Charge for 1990 was:

Guilford	80
Bloxom	33
St. Thomas	82

The people of these churches are quite loving and supportive of each other. In fact, they have been wonderful teachers of Christian love in action to me. I have received more love from these congregations than from any other Christian group. Therefore this study does not measure the influence of a community experience upon people not previously in community. These people experience a degree of community whenever they are together! The Bible studies are intended, of course, to increase community for those who participate, and the study measures the participants' understanding of salvation by grace which coincides with this increase.

I came to pastor the churches in June of 1988. Before that the churches had been pastored by the same man for 16 years. He had been a layperson who attended specially designed classes for lay pastors at Duke University during the summers in order to receive ordination.

Research Procedures

I asked for volunteers from the three churches to participate in a 12-week Bible Study. A note appeared in the Charge Bulletin which read:

Volunteers are needed for an exciting 12-week Bible Study. Come and learn more about the Bible while helping the pastor with his field research. If you are interested, please sign below and return to the pastor.

The volunteers were asked to attend one of two 12-week Bible studies. The first (Group 1) met from June to September at the parsonage. The second (Group 2) met from September to mid December at the St. Thomas United Methodist Church. All Bible study sessions were held on Wednesday evenings from 7:30 to 9:00. In addition to these volunteers, there were others who wished to help the pastor with his research but were hesitant to commit themselves for 12 weeks. These became a third group (Group 3) who completed the research instruments but did not participate in either Bible Study. The following flow chart makes this clear:

<u>Time Flow Chart</u>			
Time>	I	II	III
	(Week 1)	(Week 12)	(Week 24)
Group 1	<u>in Bible study</u> Beginnings/Galatians		
Group 2		<u>in Bible study</u> Beginnings/James	
Group 3			

Figure 1: Time Flow Chart

The first Wednesday evening was attended by 20 volunteers. Due to attrition and the failure of some participants to complete all the research instruments, the total number of participants in this group (Group 1) employed in the research was 11. Average attendance was 15, not including the evening of July 4 when the attendance was seven.

Of the 11 people in Group 1, nine were female; two male. Miller (cited in Gilligan 1982:169) reports that "women stay with, build on, and develop in a context of attachment and affiliation with others." She further writes that "women's sense of self becomes very much organized around being able

to make, and then to maintain, affiliations and relationships" (1982:169). Therefore the high percentage of women in Group 1 is not surprising. For reasons which I will present later, I believe subsequent research is desirable using a group composed equally of men and women.

The approximate ages of the participants were as follows:

Number of participants	-	Age of participants
1	-	12
2	-	20-25
3	-	40-55
5	-	65-75

Each session began and ended with the group singing this chorus:

Sing ten thousand songs of love,
 Jesus is worthy of all!
 Sing ten thousand songs of love,
 Worship and stand in awe!
 Praise our glorious risen Lord,
 Worship our coming King;
 Sing ten thousand songs of love,
 To Jesus our everything.

This song at the beginning and end of each session was an attempt to create liminality, that group feeling of the temporary suspension of social stratification which makes a sense of oneness or community more likely to occur. According to Turner (1974:94), liminality is that period or state in a rite of passage in which the individual or group is detached from an earlier fixed point in the social

structure and/or set of cultural conditions. During liminality the characteristics of the ritual subject (passenger) are ambiguous (Turner 1974:95). This generates community by minimizing the differences between people. Or in Turner's (1974:96) terms, during the liminal state of a rite of passage social stratification is largely suspended, and the participants have a sense of equality or "communitas."

The liminal state is bounded by structure. The practice of Alcoholics Anonymous to begin and end each session with the Lord's Prayer is an example of bounded structure within which liminality and communitas can occur. Another example of bounded structure is the Invocation and Benediction (usually with the congregation standing) in the Christian worship service. Such structure signifies the beginning and the end of that time in which social structure or cultural conditions are temporarily suspended.

Group 1 participants were each given a copy of Lyman Coleman's (1987a) Beginnings: Six Sessions to become a Support Group, a topical Bible Study from the "Support Group" series by Serendipity House. This was the guide for our study the first six weeks. The group met together for 20 to 30 minutes of relational games, then divided into groups of four for 25 to 30 minutes of Bible study, and then regathered for prayer requests and prayer. Following the song, refreshments were available. Beginnings is intended

to build a support group and is therefore relationally strong but biblically weak. People came with preconceptions of what they would do the first evening. For example, several participants appeared with notebooks, commentaries, and study Bibles in hand. Session one covered only Luke 10:28-32 (Coleman 1987a:6).

Although people experienced the Bible study differently than their expectations, this is not to say that they failed to enjoy themselves. The relational games were delightfully affirming (and fun) for everyone. Below is one such game:

FISHBOWL

INSTRUCTION:

1. As the people gather, ask everyone to put their name on a slip of paper and put the slip in a bowl. (If anyone is late, add their name as well.)
2. Stir up the slips and pass out a slip of paper to each person. (If you get your own name back, ask for a reshuffle.)
3. For the person you have on your slip of paper, ask this question: "If I had to describe this person as an ANIMAL, and a CAR, and a BOAT, what would I pick?" As you are thinking, turn to pages 20-21 and read all of the ANIMALS, CARS, and BOATS.
4. Then, go back and make a check mark next to one ANIMAL, one CAR, and one BOAT that comes the closest to describing this person.
5. Ask one person to begin by saying: "The person I am describing reminds me of . . ." and read the ANIMAL, CAR, and BOAT you have checked.
6. Then, let everyone try to guess who this person is. When everyone has guessed, ask this person to explain who the person was.
7. Repeat this procedure until everyone has been covered. (Coleman 1987a:18)

Among the 38 animals, car, and boats, complete with graphics, were these:

PLAYFUL PORPOISE agile, intelligent, lively
--the life of the party.

MOTHER HEN warm, sensitive, sprightly,
protective--always on the lookout for the
well-being of others.

1958 BELAIR HARDTOP CHEVY with sidepipes and high
jacks, a mahogany steering wheel and suicide knob--
the radio tuned to a 50's station and a foxtail on
the antenna.

MISSISSIPPI RIVER BOAT elegant, perfectly
appointed, with minstrel music and the smell of
perfume--quietly plying the waters.

RUBBER DINGY with makeshift paddle, compact,
transportable, inflatable--fun to be in. (Coleman
1987a:20-21)

In the second six weeks, Group 1 studied the "Galatians" section of (Coleman 1989a) 1 John Galatians: Exposing Religious Counterfeits, from the "Serendipity Group Bible Study" series. There was an obvious change in the focus of the group from enjoying interpersonal relationships to acquiring Bible knowledge with the change in curriculum. Galatians contains no relational games or activities. It provides no guidelines for the larger group, only commentary and questions for study in groups of four. We still met for an opening time to sing our song and greet one another, and we always regathered for prayer requests, prayer, and our song. We did not break into groups of four for the first session on Galatians, which was an introduction to the epistle, nor on the night of July 4, when only seven were in attendance.

A second group of volunteers (Group 2) met at the Fellowship Hall of St. Thomas United Methodist Church from

mid September to mid December. Again the sessions were held on Wednesday evenings from 7:30 to 9:00. Of the 15 people who began in Group 2, ten continued through the 12 weeks and completed the research instruments. These ten consisted of eight females and two males. Their approximate ages were as follows:

Number of participants	-	Age of participants
1	-	20-25
3	-	40-50
1	-	50-60
5	-	60-75

Group 2 studied Beginnings for the first six weeks, then the "James" section of 1 Peter James: Living through Difficult Times, from the "Serendipity Group Bible Study" series. Group 2 requested to not break into groups of four for the study of James. The attitudes of the participants were very positive in Group 2, and all but one returned for an optional thirteenth meeting to complete the curriculum on James, even though I told them that they had already fulfilled their 12-week commitment.

During weeks one to 12, I preached a series of six sermons on Galatians during the regular Sunday worship services. I preached one sermon from James sometime during weeks 13 to 24.

The Instruments Employed

Each participant in the study completed three times the "individualism" measure in Bales and Couch (1970:509-510) "The Value Profile: A Factor Analytical Study of Value Statements." The scale and statements below have not been sensitized to employ inclusive language. Man refers to human being, not maleness.

Agree or disagree with the following statements using this number scale:

Strongly disagree	1	Mildly Agree	4
Disagree	2	Agree	5
Mildly disagree	3	Strongly Agree	6

1. To be superior a man must stand alone.
2. In life, an individual should for the most part "go it alone," assuring himself of privacy, having much time to himself, attempting to control his own life.
3. It is the man who stands alone who excites our admiration.
4. The rich internal world of ideals, of sensitive feelings, of reverie, of self knowledge, is man's true home.
5. One must avoid dependence upon persons or things, the center of life should be found within oneself.
6. The most rewarding object of study any man can find is his own inner life.
7. Whoever would be a man, must be a nonconformist.
8. Contemplation is the highest form of human activity.
9. The individualist is the man who is most likely to discover the best road to a new future.
10. A man can learn better by striking out boldly on his own than he can by following the advice of others.

Each person was given a single score for the individualism measure by adding together the numerical responses to each statement. Thus, scores could range from 10 (low individualism) to 60 (high individualism).

In addition to the individualism survey, each participant completed "Self-Portrait: My Concerns, Values, and Beliefs" from Facilitators Manual Self-Portrait: My Concerns, Values, and Beliefs by Merton P. Strommen (1990). This survey was administered at the same times as the individualism measure, on weeks I (1), II (12 or 13), and III (24).

According to Strommen (1990:9), the survey was developed over a period of 30 years with special attention given to reliability and validity concerns. It contains 15 of the 25 measures which were reported in his 1988 edition of Five Cries of Youth (Strommen 1990:9). While each participant completed the entire questionnaire with its 125 questions, only two of the 15 measures are pertinent to this study. These are measure number 14, "Awareness of God," which consists of nine items with a reliability coefficient of .82; and measure number 15, "Biblical concepts," consisting of six items with a reliability coefficient of .75 (Strommen 1990:10). Below are the two measures:

GOD AWARENESS

Item No.

- 106 I pray for people whom I feel especially need
God's help.
- 107 To know Christ is to know God.
- 108 God hears our prayers.
- 115 I believe that God cares for me in a special way.
- 118 I believe that I am forgiven by God even when I sin.
- 121 I have had feelings of being in the presence of God.
- 122 I have a sense of being saved in Christ.
- 124 I have a sense that my prayers have been answered by
God.
- 125 I have a sense of sharing in a great purpose.

BIBLICAL CONCEPTS

- 109 The way to be accepted by God is to try sincerely to
live a good life.
- 110 The main emphasis of the Gospel is on God's rules
for right living.
- 111 Although there are many religions in the world, most
of them lead to the same God.
- 112 God is satisfied if people live the best life they
can.
- 113 Salvation depends upon being sincere in whatever you
believe.
- 116 If I say I believe in God and do right I will go to
heaven.

Possible responses for all 15 items were yes, no, or not sure.

It is obvious that the "Biblical concepts" measure corresponds to first of the "hoped-for outcomes" (1990:9) of the instrument, "Knowledge of grace: Perceiving what constitutes a life of faith in contrast to a do-it-yourself religion." Strommen (1990:7) describes "Biblical concepts" as the "Extent to which I reject statements of a generalized religion and reflect a Biblical faith." In this study I will use the "Biblical concepts" measure to obtain a score which reflects the participant's understanding of salvation by grace.

"God Awareness" is described as the "Extent to which I am aware of God's presence in my life as my Savior" (1990:7). The hoped for outcome is "Awareness of Christ as Savior: Holding a conviction of being forgiven and loved by God, of feeling close to Christ as Savior and Lord" (1990:9). The "God Awareness" measure is more affective than cognitive, revealing "feeling" or "awareness" in contrast to "belief" in the "Biblical concepts" measure. I use it in this study because I believe the awareness of forgiveness and feeling close to Christ is consistent with the understanding of salvation by grace. The difference in the two measures is that one measures belief while the other tends to measure experience. The use of both measures is

more likely to yield an indication of worldview change than the grace measure by itself, since a change in cognitive beliefs may be a matter of learning the right answers without internalizing them. We can be more confident that worldview change has occurred if the community experience causes scores on both measures to increase.

A number of validity studies on these measures were carried out in 1971 (Strommen 1990:10). The results confirmed the validity of the measures. Strommen (1990:10) found that youth who score higher on items measuring values and beliefs "attend church regularly, do not use drugs or alcohol, have family devotions in their home, participate in youth activities, and give high importance to their faith in Christ."

The entire Strommen instrument was administered in this research, although only two of the 15 measures were pertinent to my purposes. The participants did not know specifically what was being measured in the survey. Since Strommen developed the instrument primarily for youth research, many of the questions did not apply to adults. I told the volunteers that I would only be looking at a few of the questions, but I did not tell them which ones. They were to answer all the questions as best they could, but were not to be concerned if a particular question (such as a question concerning relationships with parents, which might be difficult for someone in their seventies to give a

response,) seemed irrelevant. As it turned out, none of the items in the measures I used were specifically youth-oriented.

For those who doubt the application of a youth survey to a primarily adult survey group, the Facilitators Manual for "Self-Portrait" includes scoring instructions for adult entries (Strommen 1990:21).

The Handling of the Data

Individual and group profiles were obtained by entering the responses to the 125 questions into the computer using software developed for the instrument. The computer processed the raw scores and standardized them so that the mean was always 50 and the standard deviation 10 (Strommen 1990:17).

The normative group is an ecumenical sample of 3,000 youth that represent major denominational groups. All scale scores are standardized on and compared against this ecumenical group. (1990:17)

Thus, each participant received a "God awareness" score and a "Biblical concepts" (grace) score, with the mean being 50. Each group also received a score on these measures which was the average score for the persons in the group.

The Data Gathered

Both the individualism instrument and the Strommen survey were administered on weeks 1, 12 or 13, and 24, (designated in this study as I, II, and III.) Thus, all participants completed both instruments three times, with few exceptions. Each individual received three scores for "God awareness," "Biblical concepts," and "individualism" which varied over time. In addition, three (I, II, and III) group profiles were produced for each of the three groups, one for each of the three times the surveys were administered.

Predicted Individualism Scores

If the Bible study experiences were successful in reducing the individualism of the participants, I predicted (the second hypothesis) that Group 1 individualism scores would go down from time I to time II, (which was the 12 week period Group 1 participated in the Bible studies,) and perhaps go up from time II to time III, (when they were no longer in the community-building Bible study.) Accordingly, I predicted (the fourth hypothesis) that Group 2 individualism scores should decrease from time II to time III, (when they were participating in the Bible study.) Group 3, which did not participate in the community-building experiences of the Bible studies, were predicted (the fifth

hypothesis) to have no significant change in individualism scores between time I and time III.

Predicted Grace Scores

Similarly, I predicted that the grace scores would increase following community experiences. In the first hypothesis I predicted that Group 1 scores would be higher at II (week 12) than at I (week 1), when the community experience began. In the third hypothesis I predicted that Group 2 scores would be higher at III (week 24) than at II (week 13), because between II and III Group 2 had been involved in a community-building Bible study. I predicted (the fifth hypothesis) no significant change in Group 3 scores on either individualism or the Strommen measures, since Group 3 volunteers did not participate in the community-building Bible study groups. Such a result would confirm the main hypothesis of this research, namely, that American worldview (specifically, individualism) negatively impacts the understanding of salvation by grace. When individualism abates, salvation by grace is more readily understood. Community is necessary to lower individualism and raise grace understanding.

Predicted God Awareness Scores

I predicted that the "God awareness" scores for the three groups would be influenced by the community experiences in the same manner as the grace scores were

influenced. Scores would be higher following a community experience than at its commencement.

The Results from the Instruments: Group 1

As stated earlier, individualism scores could range from 10 (low individualism) to 60 (high individualism).

Individualism scores for Group 1 declined in seven out of ten people from I to II, as the following table shows:

Table 1
Group 1 Individualism

Time>	I	II	III
Person	(week 1)	(week 12)	(week 24)
I.D.# 9	45	39	48
15	31	22	20
10	44	34	39
2	14	27	36
3		10	13
6	28	34	28
11	27	19	29
7	37	32	37
18	21	15	16
4	50	48	40
12	28	32	23

Note that the decline in individualism scores did not continue from II to III, the 12 weeks following the community experience. There was an increase in individualism scores from II to III in seven out of 11 people. This suggests that the Bible study was effective in reducing the individualism of the majority of the participants while it was in operation. In the 12 weeks following the intervention, however, the participants tended

to revert back to their old worldview and show higher individualism scores. This confirms the second hypothesis.

The group profile (average of individual scores) of Group 1 of the "God awareness" scale reveals an increase from 53 to 55 during the 12 week Bible study, as Table 2 shows:

Table 2
Group Profiles
Awareness of God/Biblical Concepts

Time>	I	II	III
Group 1	53/68	55/67	55/64
Group 2	56/59	56/67	56/66
Group 3	50/55	51/56	56/55

An increase of two may seem small, but the individual profiles reveal that the group score was lowered by one individual whose "God awareness" score dropped seven points from I to II:

Table 3

Group 1 Individual Profiles: God Awareness

Time>	I	II	III
Person			
I.D.# 9	52	58	58
15	55	58	58
10	58	58	58
2	47	40	51
3	55	58	58
6	58	58	58
11	47	49	51
7	49	55	53
18	53	58	50
4	54	54	54
12	58	58	58

Thus, from I to II "God awareness" increased in six out of the 11 participants, stayed even in another four, and decreased in one person. It is impossible to know what was happening when person #2 took the survey the second time. Perhaps he/she was having a bad day. Person #2's scores varied widely on all the measurements, as the above scores of 47, 40, and 51 suggest. Apart from #2's II score, the increase in "God awareness" in Group 1 from I to II, before and after the community-building Bible study, is significant.

A look at the III column in Table 3 reveals that seven of 11 people were unchanged in "God awareness" from II to III, while two went up and two went down. Apparently something positive was taking place in the community experience of the first 12 weeks that did not happen in weeks 13 to 24, when Group 1 was no longer meeting together. It is encouraging, however, that the gains in "God awareness" the first 12 weeks were fairly well sustained during the second 12 weeks.

Table 2 indicates that the group profile for Group 1 revealed a decrease in "Biblical concepts" from I to II, and from II to III. Again, the individual profiles tell another tale. From I to II, six of the 11 scores went up, while two other high scores remained unchanged:

Table 4

Group 1 Individual Profiles: Biblical Concepts

Time> Person	I	II	III
I.D.# 9	59	60	46
15	51	59	54
10	66	71	76
2	82	66	63
3	82	82	82
6	71	64	58
11	63	64	53
7	46	47	47
18	72	78	78
4	70	62	70
12	82	82	82

What is most startling about the above grace scores in Group 1 is that all six individuals (numbers 9,15,10,11,7,18) whose grace scores went up from week 1 to week 12 also recorded a drop in their individualism scores over the same period. These same six individuals also recorded an increase in "God awareness" over that 12 week period, except that person #10 remained at a constant 58 over the entire 24 weeks. Surely this correlation is more than coincidental.

From II to III five of the 11 grace scores dropped, while four remained unchanged. This slight decrease from II to III, indeed the entire 24 week picture for the individual profiles for Group 1, roughly corresponds inversely with Group 1's individualism scores. In other words, during the period II to III, when a Bible study was not held, Group 1's grace scores decreased while their individualism scores increased.

The Results from the Instruments: Group 2

Below are individualism scores for Group 2:

Table 5

Group 2 Individualism

Time>	I	II	III
Person			
I.D.# 73	12	14	27
201	26		41
206	18		23
70		25	
104	26	31	28
76		41	15
202	14	18	17
71	28	35	37
74	20	30	34
203	20	25	21

From week 1 to week 13 (I to II), six out of six individualism scores increased in Group 2, the very period of time when seven out of ten Group 1 individualism scores went down. From week 13 to 24 (II to III) four out of seven people in Group 2 decreased in their individualism score. This was during Group 2's 12 week Bible study. This result is inadequate to suggest that Group 2 enjoyed a community experience.

The group profile for Group 2 (Table 2, page 132) reveals an unchanged "God awareness" score (56) for the entire 24 week period, and a large increase in "Biblical concepts" from week 1 (59) to week 13 (67). (However, the increase is partly due to the addition of persons #76 and #70, whose II scores were 82 and 77 respectively. These two people pulled the average up for Group 2. Without their II scores, Group 2 increased from 59 to 64 from I to II, which, while it is still a significant increase, is considerably less than Table 2 indicates.)

"Biblical concepts" scores increased while individualism scores also rose higher. This is not what I would have expected to find. Since the increase in "Biblical concepts" cannot be attributed to worldview change (individualism increased, not decreased), it is most probably due to the preaching series on Galatians. However, the data on Group 3, which, like Group 2, was not in community-forming Bible study during weeks 1 to 12, reveals that Group 3 only

increased one point in "Biblical concepts" on the group profile. Why did Group 2 show a large increase in "Biblical concepts" from the sermon series while Group 3 did not? The answer may be that Group 2, in demonstrating their receptivity or hunger for Bible study through their volunteerism, was more responsive to the preaching during those 12 weeks than was Group 3.

Group 2's increase in grace ("Biblical concepts") from week 1 to week 13 casts doubt on Group 1 results. To what extent was the rise in grace scores in Group 1 during weeks 1 to 12 due to the preaching on Galatians rather than the community experience? Since grace scores and individualism scores both increased during weeks 1 to 13 for Group 2, can it be maintained that individualism negatively impacts the understanding of grace? The answer to this question may lie in the "God awareness" scores of the two groups. Group 1 had a significant increase in "God awareness" from week 1 to week 12. Group 2 did not. Below are the individual profile scores for Group 2:

Table 6

Group 2 Individual Profiles: God Awareness

Time>	I	II	III
Person			
I.D.# 73	58	58	58
201	58	58	54
206	58	58	58
70		52	52
104	55	55	58
76		58	58
202	58	58	53
71	55	55	55
74	55	54	54
203	53	55	58

Group 2's failure to increase in "God awareness" during a dramatic increase in "Biblical concepts" suggests the inadequacy of information alone to change people's lives. As noted in chapter 4, worldview is changed by experience. It is possible to change cognitive belief without altering the deeper level of worldview assumptions. Change in belief without worldview change is superficial. Therefore I believe that churches which depend exclusively on preaching to change people's lives will be far less effective than those who provide experiences consistent with the desired change and whose mode of operation models the desired

change. It appears that the community experience contributed to the "God awareness" increase for Group 1, while Group 2 did not increase in "God awareness" for lack of that experience. The sermon series on Galatians was sufficient to increase the grace beliefs of Group 2, but not their awareness of Christ's presence in their lives.

Below are the individual grace scores for Group 2:

Table 7

Group 2 Individual Profiles: Biblical Concepts (Grace)

Time>	I	II	III
Person			
I.D.# 73	71	59	51
201	56	74	74
206	50	48	65
70		77	74
104	59	74	74
76		82	82
202	82	78	78
71	39	39	39
74	57	64	64
203	55	70	55

Only one person increased in "Biblical concepts" from week 13 to week 24, a fact which is not too surprising since individualism scores did not significantly decrease during that period. The study of James may also have been a

factor. I anticipated that if a person had a decrease in individualism they would have an increase in "Biblical concepts" (grace) despite the study of James, Luther's "straw epistle." Person #76, whose individualism score dropped dramatically from II to III maintained an 82 on the "Biblical concepts" measure during that period. While I predicted a rise on the "Biblical concepts" measure to correspond with such a large drop, no person in all the research I conducted scored higher than 82 on the "Biblical concepts" measure. Furthermore, I am suspicious of #76's individualism scores, which ranged from 41 which is very high to an extremely low score of 15. What could possibly account for such a dramatic drop in 12 weeks time? Did he/she discuss the instrument with someone else?

The Results of the Data: Group 3 (Control Group)

Since Group 3 was a set of volunteers who completed the research instruments without participating in one of the community-building Bible studies, I anticipated no significant change (the fifth hypothesis) on either their individualism, "God awareness", or "Biblical concepts" scores. Table 8 indicates that Group 3 individualism scores were mixed:

Table 8
Group 3 Individualism

Time> Person	I	II	III
I.D.# 52	29	21	35
19	25		33
311	23	28	26
105	25		45
101	23	22	28
205	30	30	26
204	33	29	29
102	27	29	24
58	22	19	23
8		46	31

From week 1 to week 12, there were three decreases and four increases in the individualism scores. From week 12 to 24, there were four decreases and three increases. These mixed results were expected in Group 3.

Table 2 (page 132) indicates a significant rise in Group 3's "God awareness," but this group score was skewed because of one individual's scores (a newly churchd person) in whom God was at work through a serious medical crisis. Below are the individual profiles for Group 3:

Table 9

Group 3 Individual Profiles: God Awareness

Time>	I	II	III
Person			
I.D.# 52	58	58	58
19	10	25	53
311	49	55	58
105	52	52	58
101	42	48	47
205	58	52	58
204	58	58	58
102	58	58	58
58	58	58	58
8	58	52	58

Person #105's scores are an enigma. He/she had high III scores on all three scales. Below are the individual profiles in "Biblical concepts" for Group 3:

Table 10

Group 3 Individual Profiles: Biblical Concepts

Time> Person	I	II	III
I.D.# 52	40	39	39
19	59	70	43
311	82	76	77
105	55	59	77
101	41	41	39
205	45	45	45
204	47	40	40
102	45	59	60
58	82	82	82
8	51	49	45

The reader may wonder about person #19. This person scored a huge increase in "God awareness" throughout the study period, from 10 to 25 to 53. Yet, "Biblical concepts" declined dramatically from II to III. What might account for this? I believe it is due to the fact that this person is one who is very newly churchd and whose beliefs are still being formed. While this person may not be sure of what he/she believes about salvation, there is the growing conviction that God cares and is present in her/his life.

As expected, no consistent pattern for change emerges from the above figures for Group 3.

Interpretation of the Data

The theological reflection in Chapter 3 and the study of worldview in Chapter 4 have supported the main hypothesis of this research, that American individualism has a negative impact on the understanding of salvation by grace. Does the third research piece, the field research, confirm the main hypothesis as well? Because of the small sample the results are tentative. Nevertheless, most of the data supported the hypothesis. Most positive were the Group 1 results, especially those six individuals whose "God awareness" and "Biblical concepts" scores rose from I to II while their individualism scores decreased. Moreover, their individualism scores rose from II to III in 5 out of 6 cases, indicating that their worldview assumption was only temporarily neutralized from I to II. As individualism rose from II to III there was a slight decrease in "Biblical concepts" among these 6 people.

However, taken as a whole, Group 1 results were not as positive. Group 1 actually declined in "Biblical concepts" from I to II due to the scores of one individual. This points to an obvious weakness in the sample size of the population researched. Had the groups been larger, the contrary scores of one individual would have been absorbed by the group.

Only four out of seven people in Group 2 decreased in individualism scores from II to III, the period when they were in community-forming Bible study. Such a result is not especially convincing evidence that community occurred. Had such an actuality occurred, their scores at week 24 (III) on "Biblical concepts" and "God awareness" would have been far more interesting. Would these scores have increased, even though James was the subject of the Bible studies? Then again, the study of James could have contributed to the mixed individualism scores in III (week 24).

Furthermore, the rise in Group 2's individualism scores from I to II, when there was no variable manipulated in the research for Group 2, is a concern. It raises the question as to whether Group 1 variations on the individualism scale were due to outside (albeit different) factors.

Taking into account the meager data from Group 2, the research results as a whole nevertheless provide evidence in support of the main hypothesis that individualism negatively influences the American understanding of salvation by grace. While the results were not as clear as I had hoped, the data from Group 1 suggests that further research with a larger population will more clearly confirm the hypothesis. Research with a more diverse population might also effect the results. I believe the greater diversity of the people experiencing unconditional love and acceptance, the greater will be the power of that community to communicate the grace

of God. That is, groups which are diverse in race, age, gender, socio-economic position, etc. will have more power to communicate the grace of God than those which are homogeneous. Such groups demonstrate that they are knit together by something greater than common interest or social affinities. The broader the love of the group, the more likely it is that "even me" could be included. I believe that such power would not be tempered whether the study focused on James or Galatians.

We have seen that salvation by grace is more readily apprehended in small groups following a Bible study curriculum designed to build a "support group" or community. Other Christian communities such as the Emmaus Walk appear to achieve similar results (Kiehl 1989:14). What are the implications of this finding for the American church? Can the cultural bias in the United States against salvation by grace be neutralized by implementing a small group ministry in the local church? Or does the power of individualism as a worldview theme require more than a simple strategy to place people in small groups? What else can be done to communicate salvation by grace? These are the questions of the final chapter.

CHAPTER 6

Recovering Grace in the American Church:
Conclusions and Recommendations

Four-year-old Mandy walked into my office late one Saturday evening. She pulled herself up into a big chair and sat there, adult like, her hands folded in her lap.

"Pastor," she said tentatively, "I'll bet you can't guess my puppy's name!"

"I don't know Mandy, what is it?"

"You have to guess."

"All right," I said, "is it Spot?"

"Nope."

"Is it Rover?"

"Nope."

"Is it Patches?"

"No."

"I don't know, Mandy," I said. "What is your puppy's name?"

"It's Hughie," she said.

"Hughie!" I cried. "What a wonderful name for a puppy." Then I got real serious and said, "But you know, Mandy, I don't think I ever would have guessed your puppy's name, no matter how long I tried."

Mandy's face fell. "Pastor," she said, "Now that I've told you, would you like to guess again?"

"All right," I said. "Is it Hughie?"

"Yes," she cried gleefully, "that's it!"

Here is an encounter full of grace. Grace is given by a four-year-old girl to an adult (role reversal) when the latter confesses honestly that he never would get the answer right. There is "unmerited favor" in Mandy's joy over my correct response, even though she had to tell me the answer to her question.

Why is grace so hard to find? Why is salvation by grace so hard to accept? Our search for grace began in Chapter 1 where I disclosed my own salvation journey and my still tentative grasp of grace. I introduced the possibility that a tension between culture and theology, individualism and grace, might provide an answer to these questions.

Chapter 2 reviewed the literature which might lead to an answer. There are theological and cultural explanations for the problem of communicating salvation by grace in North America.

Chapter 3 was a search for a historical and theological explanation of our present "individual" interpretation of justification by faith, or salvation by grace. We saw that Paul applied the doctrine to a religious and social problem--it was his answer to how Gentiles and Jews could find community in the church apart from Gentile observance of the Torah. Salvation by grace is the basis of Christian community.

Chapter 4 presented evidence that the American church has lost salvation by grace. Our individualist, moralist, humanist understandings of life and reality have little place for God and grace. We saw that Americans are highly religious, but American religion is pretty much of the "human-effort" variety. We saw that Alcoholics Anonymous, with its emphasis on "hitting bottom," or what I call the death of self-reliance, offers a model by which the church might recover a more vital experience of community which mediates grace.

Chapter 5 presented research results which supply some empirical evidence for the thesis that grace is discovered more readily in community, especially small-group community, than otherwise.

This chapter offers recommendations on how salvation by grace might be recovered (rediscovered?) in the American church. This must indeed sound strange to evangelical readers for whom justification by faith is the cardinal doctrine. How could something so obvious, so important, be lost? Do we not preach it from our pulpits nearly every Sunday? Many in our congregations, however, do not (cannot?) hear our sermons on justification; their worldview interprets them in terms of human effort, if indeed the sermons are God-centered enough to need such interpretation. In all likelihood most of our sermons are consistent with the human-effort type of religion most American Christians

practice. I hope by now the argument has at least opened the reader to such a possibility.

Before presenting the conclusions of this study, the reader should consider the two phrases we have used synonymously in this research, (as I believe they are in common usage for most evangelicals), the terms "justification by faith" and "salvation by grace." Although both describe the same reality, I prefer the latter. "Grace" is a term which, when referring to salvation, has no human associations. It is a "God" word. "Faith," however, has human associations. While in classical Protestantism justification by faith refers to Christ--it is justification by faith in what God has done for me in Christ--"faith" also has human associations. People are encouraged to "have faith" as if faith could be humanly achieved or be a personal possession. It is surely true that the Scriptures declare the necessity of belief or faith, but the reference, whether implicit or explicit, is always to God or Christ. It is a way of pointing to Christ. Because I believe people sometimes fail to understand my meaning, I rarely use the word "faith" by itself. When I say "faith" I mean "in Christ," but the receiver of the message may hear "faith" and interpret "me," or "my responsibility." "Grace," however, is a "God" word, and is less likely to be misinterpreted as human effort.

We have seen that individualism is a worldview theme that causes Americans to see salvation as something they earn on their own. It also militates against Christian community necessary to mediate grace. What can be done to limit the effects of individualism on the church? What efforts could be made to increase people's understanding of salvation by grace? Some might simply ignore these questions by assigning this task to the work of the Holy Spirit. After all, justification by faith is concomitant with regeneration, and one cannot engineer the new birth. "The wind blows where it chooses" (John 3:8). Yet the Spirit does work through people. For example, it was more than coincidental when John Wesley felt his heart strangely warmed during the reading of Luther's preface to Romans. The Spirit used Luther's words on justification to impress upon Wesley the atoning work of Christ on his behalf.

We have arrived at the main conclusions of this dissertation. Three things must happen to make salvation by grace plausible to the American mind. First, the church must repeatedly hear that salvation by grace is the basis of its community. The theologically trained must preach and teach grace without moralism. Moralism is the religion of the self-reliant individual. Second, the church made aware of its foundation in grace must communicate the message of grace by its life together. Third, the church must recover mystery in its worship. Without mystery the self-reliant

individual is trapped in a view of reality in which, for all practical purposes, God does not exist. There can be no grace without the God who gives grace.

Christian Leaders Need to Communicate Grace without
Moralism as the Basis of Christian Community

Whenever the necessity of communicating salvation by grace is proposed among people with a knowledge of the Scriptures, two objections often emerge.

Two Objections to Emphasizing Grace

First, it is nearly always pointed out that the grace of God in the Scriptures is balanced by human responsibility. Robert W. Wall (1987) has clearly demonstrated that the New Testament is balanced between law and grace, demand and promise, and that the Bible's diversity provides "multiple perspectives which mutually inform and correct each other" (1987:40). He writes (1987:40), "We should learn to celebrate such differences as divinely inspired 'checks and balances' which continue to guide the whole church." Thus, Matthew and James view the law in terms of demand, while for Luke and Paul the law is a promise that Jesus has already fulfilled (Wall 1987:50). These two views of the law are checks against antinomianism on the one hand and legalism on the other. Although the matter is open to debate, Donovan (1989:37-38) is convinced that Paul and James had sharp

disagreements and speak directly to each other in the New Testament on the question of law and grace. Therefore, it is easily argued that an emphasis on grace which destroys this balance is scripturally unsound.

I would argue that American culture, influenced by individualism and modernity, destroys the balance of Scripture, and that in order for the balance between God's grace and human responsibility to be regained and maintained there must be an intentional emphasis on grace. Those who communicate the gospel in America must compensate for the cultural bias toward human responsibility.

A further objection to emphasizing grace over law might be that one can emphasize God in a secular society without emphasizing salvation by grace because God is also a God of judgment.

No doubt it is true that judgment is generally a missing ingredient in the fare being served up from many American pulpits today (Menninger 1973:14,228). Clergy have preached a platitudinous version of the love of God until many congregations are bored or sick. I am in agreement with this objection but with two qualifications. First, when clergy preach on the judgment of God they need to be aware that the message may be interpreted as holier-than-thou Phariseeism. The preacher must make clear that the gift of God in Jesus Christ, rather than moral or religious attainment, is God's provision to escape judgment. It is

best to avoid an us-and-them mentality in the sermon on judgment, which divides people between the saved and the unsaved, the church and the unchurched. Far better is the message which places everyone under the judgment of God, for "all have sinned" (Romans 3:23). Those who are "saved" are saved by grace and not by religious superiority over the unsaved. Therefore, the preacher of judgment should place herself or himself among the guilty. This is the preacher's true condition. And such identification with sinners is in keeping with Jesus' example, whose baptism by John was a baptism for sinners.

Secondly, one must remember that grace comes before judgment. The cross reveals the sin of humanity. Ellul writes (1986:151), "We learn about sin only on the basis of the proclamation of grace and pardon." Newbigin (1989:180) writes that the knowledge that we are sinners is the result rather than the precondition of grace. Grace includes judgment as a logical necessity, since without sin grace would be unnecessary. The opposite, however, is not the case. Grace does not logically follow from judgment. The good news of God in Christ is not a logical necessity. If the church is not intentional about communicating the grace of God then sin could be the last word.

The Difference between Judgment and Moralism

Before presenting suggestions on how grace might be communicated without moralism, we need to consider the

difference between judgment and moralism. The biblical record is full of the judgment of God. God judges nations and individuals. Judgment is sometimes carried out in this life, as in the case of Herod, but always in the life to come. "It is appointed for mortals to die once, and after that the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). Judgment is a good reason to fear God. The divine remedy for judgment is salvation by grace (John 3:16). Moralism is the substitution of morality for the salvific work of God in Christ. Dyrness (1989:147) writes, "Until people understand their fundamental dependence, they will know nothing about biblical faith." Any human activity, no matter how religious or noble, can be a moralism. For example, prayer is a moralism when it is substituted for the salvific work of God in Christ. When one's salvation depends on one's prayers or piety, the gospel has degenerated into moralism. Therefore all religious activity should be framed as a response to the cross. John Wesley (1981) on I John 4:19 writes that the sum of all religion, "the genuine model of Christianity" is that we love because He first loved us. Whenever a congregation is prodded to an activity in order to be saved rather than as a response to what God has done for them in Christ, the message is a moralism. There are really no "oughts" for the Christian. "Ought" is replaced by discovery, love, and gratitude.

In the worldview dominated by self-reliant individualism and modernity, the tendency to interpret Christian faith in terms of moralism is extremely powerful. Experience which challenges these worldview assumptions will be more effective than words. I noted on pages 139-140 that churches which depend exclusively on preaching to change people's lives will be far less effective than those who provide experiences consistent with the desired change. Preaching alone might help people answer theological questions correctly without increasing a sense of God's presence in their lives. The reader will recall that my own sermons on grace have often been received with blank stares. However, since the basis of Christian community is salvation by grace, grace-preaching is necessary to form the grace-community. The preacher must also be intentional about preaching salvation by grace to keep from reinforcing moralistic interpretations of the Christian faith.

Preaching the Message of Grace

There is no finer preacher of grace in the American church than Lloyd John Ogilvie. Three of his books of sermons have titles which lift up the grace of God and/or implicitly challenge the assumptions of human-effort religion: Falling into Greatness (1984), When God First Thought of You (1978), and Let God Love You (1974). The idea of falling into greatness is beautiful, since most Americans assume that greatness is achieved by climbing and

hard work (human effort). It also suggests the Alcoholics Anonymous idea of hitting bottom. The second title suggests that one is special to God even before one is born; that is, one's worth is in one's being rather than one's doing or achievements. The same idea is in the third title. People need to let God love them for who they are rather than strive to gain God's favor through performance or human effort.

In my own struggle to communicate salvation by grace I have learned to preach on the humanity of the saints, since the failures of the saints challenge the adequacy of moralism and self-reliance. One might preach on the question of why God chose Jacob over his elder brother, Esau. Jacob was no angel. One might preach on David's failures. David committed murder and adultery, then covered it up, yet God restored him. Certainly David's sin had terrible consequences for the family, but the point is that it is heartening to recall that David, a man after God's own heart, enjoyed a relationship with God in which divine forgiveness and grace were required.

There are numerous instances of human failure among the New Testament saints. The sons of Zebedee were guilty of pride, and all the disciples quarrelled about their importance. Peter denied Jesus. Even after he had become a pillar in the church Peter was two-faced (Galatians 2:11-12). Peter's Christian experience must have been different

from the Episcopal priest who candidated for bishop. When asked by the candidacy committee about his most recent failure, the priest replied, "I don't recall ever having failed" (cited in Job and Shawchuck 1983:82). Peter, of course, had no opportunity to lie about his failure, since it occurred in public and Paul published it.

I have personally witnessed the effectiveness of sermons on the failures of the saints to communicate salvation by grace and to inject health into the church. Not long ago I preached a sermon on Peter's failure in the epistle to the Galatians. It turned out that a newly churchd person was saved that day from disillusionment with the church, since he had been offended during the week past by a district church leader. The reminder of Peter's failure, who was a "church pillar," confronted that newly churchd person with the truth that all people are fallible, even leaders in the church. The offended person saw clearly that the church is not based on human perfection, and that perfectionist expectations will always lead to disillusionment.

Preaching on the failures of the saints communicates that salvation is not attained by human perfection. And if human behavior does not merit salvation, then it must be that God is pre-disposed to save us.

Grace is also communicated by preaching on the humanity of Jesus--his temptation, his baptism of repentance, his struggle in the garden. The humanity of Jesus gives the

congregation permission to be human too, and suggests that the gulf between God and humans has been bridged by God who became human. The frustrated human attempt to become like God is unnecessary.

One can also communicate salvation by grace by preaching on Jesus' concern for the marginalized of society. He was a friend of the common people, the unchurched. At the same time he criticized the religious establishment for being hypocritical and self-righteous.

I have found that the message of salvation by grace is especially appealing to the unchurched. When those who consider themselves outsiders of the church hear the message of grace it breaks down the wall that divides them from those who have served God all their lives. Our study of Krister Stendahl revealed that Paul employed the doctrine of justification by faith to unite Jewish and Gentile Christians. The unchurched are the Gentiles of today, and they can find unity with the church in the message of salvation by grace. That is, salvation by grace can unite the church and unchurched just as it united Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians in Paul's time. Since the righteousness of the saints does not merit salvation, the message of grace puts the church and the unchurched on the same level. Grace is the Christian version of "My name is _____, and I'm an alcoholic." Preaching against self-righteousness is good news to the unchurched. It gives

them hope. It makes the Christian life attainable. I once preached a sermon from Galatians chapter one where Paul writes of how improbable was the grace of God that turned him from a persecutor of the church to a preacher of the faith. The sermon was entitled, "The Unlikely Christian," and the theme was that all of us are unlikely candidates for discipleship. The unchurched are more reachable when grace is our message. Many times they are kept out of the church by what they perceive as the self-righteousness of the church members (Hale 1980:184).

It hardly needs to be stated that the cross should be the centerpiece for grace-preaching. I say "should" because sermons on the cross do not automatically communicate grace. They can communicate guilt and moralism, as evidenced by what has become known as "worm theology." Grace sermons focus on God's saving work in ways that dignify the sinner.

A college professor of mine once told the story of a man who shook the preacher's hand following a preaching service and said, "I wouldn't give pittance to find out where my duty lies, but I'll go half way around the globe to find out where my help comes from." The story was one of the ways the professor taught his students to focus their preaching on the good news of God in Christ.

In Chapter 4 we saw that American religion in the 19th century was largely moralistic because it was disseminated by the theologically untrained (Neuhaus 1986:3, Finke and

Starke 1989:35). Brueggemann (1989:84) noted that yet-to-be-formed seminarians preached sermons filled with "must, ought, and should." Salvation by grace is unique to Christianity. All the other religions of the world are based on religious effort to reach or appease God. Only in Christianity does God reach humankind (Hollenweger 1990). The understanding of salvation by grace therefore does not come naturally. When we are not careful in our theological thinking we revert back to folk theology or appeasement theology. For salvation by grace is not common sense, it is good news.

When the church begins to find the basis of its fellowship in salvation by grace it will become corporately a credible witness to grace in an individualistic society.

The Christian Community Communicates Grace
by Its Life Together

We have seen that the experience of community for Christians increases their understanding of salvation by grace while at the same time decreasing their individualism. Community is necessary to lower individualism and raise grace understanding. However, churches do not always demonstrate community which communicates grace. Sometimes the messages coming from the church deny grace.

The Witness of the Community Based on Grace

The community based on salvation by grace is the most powerful witness to the reality of grace to the unbeliever. When grace is the basis of relationships it becomes credible. When the Christian community operates under the humble admission that all are sinners saved by grace salvation becomes accessible. Grace is communicated where people are valued and esteemed and treated as precious. The community of grace has no insignificant members. When everyone is precious in the community, then one might believe in one's own worth.

However, just as the mind readily slips into appeasement theology, so too, relationships can quickly find a basis other than grace. When some are valued more than others, then every individual in the community has reason to doubt one's own worth. Even those who are highly esteemed may doubt their worth, since all are not esteemed. After all, there must be some basis for valuing some more than others. What is that basis? Wealth? Talent? What if wealth or talent fail? Unless all are precious, no one is precious.

Mebane and Ridley (1988) present an excellent example of how the Christian community sends unspoken messages which deny grace. When the pastor pretends to model perfection there is little room for failure among the laity. Salvation by grace may be preached from the pulpit, but the unspoken message is that the church is not a safe place to be human.

How much better to create a humble atmosphere that admits that the entire community is fallible. Such an admission need not be defeatist, since God is at work in the community to fill it with his beauty and love.

Pastors who are afraid to reveal their imperfections could learn from Henri Nouwen's (1972) The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society. Wounds or brokenness, far from disqualifying one from ministry, are a source of healing for others. When the role-model rejects self-reliance in favor of God's healing and grace, it gives those who follow permission to do the same.

Building Community in the Local Church

I suggested in Chapter 4 that the church could learn much about community from Alcoholics Anonymous. The essence of community is unity or oneness, and this oneness is achieved in A.A. by the humble admission that "my name is _____, and I am an alcoholic." In A.A. community is a gift which comes out of a common experience of brokenness, or "hitting bottom." The humility of A.A. is treasured and maintained by the refusal to allow professional status, the refusal to accept outside monetary support, and the emphasis on anonymity. It is also evidenced by the lack of an authoritarian structure and the absence of rules except the rule of "great suffering and great love" (Alcoholics Anonymous 1957:120). Every one of the twelve steps demonstrates brokenness or humility. They are about making

"a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves" (step 4), and admitting "to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs" (step 5). The reader will recall from Chapter 4 that the humility or admission of failure in the alcoholic is met with unconditional acceptance from the group. "The first impression of why A.A. is effective is that of unconditional acceptance" (Nace 1987:242).

What can the church learn about community from A.A.? It can seek to build community by emphasizing those things that all people (including the unchurched) have in common rather than emphasizing their differences. It can lay stress on the truth that it is a fellowship of sinners. Like the constituents of A.A., the constituents of the church are all broken people. Categorizing people in terms of spiritual growth divides people and destroys the unity of the community based on humility and brokenness. While it is probably not possible to do without a professional clergy, certainly the differences between clergy and laity can be minimized. Laity can be entrusted with ministry, and clergy can admit that they too have faults rather than pretending perfection.

The church is the place where broken people find healing. A local church can demonstrate community by starting groups for broken people. Twelve-step groups for alcoholics, overeaters, drug addiction, smokers, or other

forms of brokenness, which are a ministry of the church, demonstrate that the Christian community is for broken people. Brokenness and grace, not perfectionism or self-reliance, builds community.

We saw in Chapter 5 that a person's individualism decreased through involvement in small group Bible studies designed to build community. It appears that a small group experience can increase the experience of community in the local church. However, community does not occur automatically in small groups. I found Coleman's materials on building community in small groups to be invaluable. Coleman's strategy includes open and compassionate relationships, Scripture, and prayer. I believe these three ingredients are vital to building community in small groups.

Open and compassionate relationships. Coleman is very clear on the relational dynamics necessary "to become a depth, support group" (1987a:9). He notes that "A lot of groups never develop into a genuine caring community" (1987a:9), and suggests that the three steps to becoming a community are like a baseball diamond. People reach first base when they tell their own story, including their childhood, their journey, and their hopes and dreams for the future (1987a:9). Second base is simply responding to these stories with positive appreciation and affirmation. People respond with statements like "This is what I appreciate about you" or "This is the beautiful thing I see in you" or

"Here is where I see you as special, unique, gifted" (1987a:19). Third base involves more self-disclosure. At this level people present their struggles, anxieties, and areas where they need help from God and the group (1987a:9). The group attempts with the help of the Holy Spirit to be compassionate and to listen with empathy without giving answers or advice (1987a:25). Through the whole process the group must be very intentional about building community and employing these steps (1987a:9).

We have seen the importance of open and compassionate relationships in Alcoholics Anonymous. The participants experience "the shared honesty of mutual vulnerability openly acknowledged" (Kurtz 1979:61).

Scripture. The importance of Scripture in Coleman's strategy is clear, since the support group gathers for group Bible study. Communities are shaped by the stories they attend (Hauerwas and Willimon 1989:68). We have seen that salvation by grace is the basis of Christian community. When the Bible is interpreted as good news it has a community-building effect. Paul employed the doctrine of justification by faith to build community between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians.

Worship. In addition to open and affirming relationships and Scripture, worship is vital to building community in small groups. All of Coleman's Bible study sessions end with a time of praying for each other. I

included a song of praise to God at the beginning and end of each session in the field research, and it seemed to be warmly appreciated by all. We have seen that "the twelve steps [of Alcoholics Anonymous] are spiritual. That's what they are" (Klaas 1982:12). For the significance of worship on communicating grace see the section on mystery below.

Resisting the Effects of Modernity on Community

The church witnesses to salvation by grace when its life together demonstrates that it is a community based on grace. But the Christian community is easily ravaged by the effects of modernity. Accordingly, the community will not likely communicate grace unless the temptations of modernity "the ideal breeding ground for individualism" (Gaede 1985:135), are addressed. The effect of modernity on community is the theme of S.D. Gaede's (1985) Belonging: Our Need for Community in Church and Family.

According to Gaede (1985:128) the basic elements of community are relationships, tradition, and vision. We will consider each of these three elements.

Relationships. When we remember that the key word in modernity is "choice," it is easy to understand how modernity can destroy community. Churches frequently lack community because relationships become matters of personal choice and self-interest. If church members do not like the pastor or someone else in the church, they can choose to break their relationship with the people of that church,

move to a different one, and form new relationships again. Americans are used to shopping for the best church to meet their needs in the same manner as they shop for the best supermarket. They look for a church with the right programs or the most dynamic ministries. The institution that emerges in this climate may be anything other than the church. Hauerwas and Willimon write, "What we call 'church' is too often a gathering of strangers who see the church as yet another 'helping institution' to gratify further their individual desires" (1989:138). If for some reason people feel that the church is no longer fulfilling their desires, they sometimes change churches as easily as they change supermarkets. Personal choice, not loyalty to the community of faith, is the decisive factor in people's decisions.

Stewart (1972:49) has pointed out that Americans make friends easily. They have many casual friendships but few lasting ones. No wonder Americans have been described as "the lonely crowd" (Riesman 1950). Churches which communicate grace by their life together will teach the value of subordinating "personal choice" and "freedom" in favor of more lasting relationships.

I have personally experienced the effects of modernity on community in my own ministry. I have pastored modern California suburban churches, and I have pastored in an isolated rural area of Virginia where the effects of modernity have still not reached entirely. One of my

biggest frustrations as a pastor in California was the inability to build community in the church due to the mobility of the people (in one municipality the rate of turnover in the population was 25% per year) and the tendency of some to shop from church to church looking for the church that would "meet my needs." In contrast, one of my most pleasant surprises on the Eastern Shore of Virginia is the loyalty of the laity to the local church. Though many of the churches are small and have little to offer in terms of a consumer mentality, there is seldom a break in the church relationship.

Tradition. Gaede's (1985:128) second basic element of community is tradition. Traditions are basic to building and sustaining community, since they provide the people with a sense of "who we are." That church is wise which does not cast off traditions easily.

Traditions . . . remind us of events that need to be remembered, experiences that ought to be symbolized, joys that crave to be rekindled, sorrows that yearn to be borne again. . . . We need them because a life empty of tradition is a life void of its past and incapable of producing a meaningful future. It is a life of impoverished freedom. (Gaede 1985:148)

There is no community without a shared history, which traditions convey. Hauerwas and Willimon (1989:68) write that communities are formed and shaped by the stories they attend.

Vision. Gaede's (1985:128) third basic element of community is vision, which lies closest to the theme of this dissertation. He believes that Christian vision consists of two paradoxical truths--the sovereignty of God and human freedom--and that modernity causes one of those truths to be emphasized at the expense of the other.

The single greatest problem with the Christian vision of community is its tendency to emphasize one of these two truths at the expense of the other. For [the pre-modern person] the problem tended to be the fact of his dependence on God; for [the modern person] it is the existence of human freedom. (1985:160)

Thus, sociologist S.D. Gaede observes that in the worldview of modernity there is a tendency for human freedom to overshadow the sovereignty of God, which is part of the vision necessary for Christian community. (I have presented evidence in Chapters 4 and 5 that human freedom, or Enlightenment-brand individualism, overshadows the salvation of God.) Gaede's contention that the vision of God is necessary for Christian community suggests that churches are more successful at sustaining community when they are God-focused (grace) or worship-oriented.

Grace, Worldview, and the Witness of the Diverse Christian Community

It is well-known that people like to join churches without crossing social and cultural barriers. "Men like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic, or

class barriers" (McGavran 1980:223). Churches therefore tend to be relatively lacking in cultural and social diversity. It is also usually the case that socially diverse churches tend not to grow (McGavran 1980:244).

The problem with social diversity in the Christian community is that it makes the mediation of grace from one person to another more difficult. Friendships and community are more likely to occur where people share common interests and traits.

However, there seems to be a trade-off when churches opt to grow along homogeneous lines and thus more readily mediate the grace of God to individuals. While such churches unquestionably bring more people to faith than churches which are relatively more heterogeneous, the witness of the homogeneous church as a whole is diminished. Since no two people are alike, all churches are somewhat diverse and thus in some measure demonstrate the power of salvation by grace to unite diverse peoples. However, in homogeneous churches it is not clear whether the basis of community is grace or something like kinship, clan, or social similarities.

Churches which grow along homogeneous lines may therefore obscure the message they hope to proclaim. Fortunately, the church is not faced with an either/or situation. A completely diverse Christian community exists only as a theoretical ideal. A degree of homogeneity seems

necessary in every Christian community. But taken to the extreme, growth through homogeneous units does appear to make the power of God socially unnecessary.

Communities which are relatively diverse socially and ethnically are closer to the historical situation which necessitated the Pauline development of the doctrine of salvation by grace. They give witness to the possibility that the basis of their fellowship is their salvation as a free gift from God. While they are less effective in mediating grace to individual people than homogeneous churches, they might be more effective over the long term in challenging the American worldview assumption that God does not exist. When the lion and the lamb lie down together, it is surely a sign that the kingdom of God has come. Hauerwas and Willimon (1989:83) write, "We serve the world by showing it something that it is not, namely, a place where God is forming a family out of strangers."

The Church Recovers the Mystery of Christ's Presence through Worship

I believe that mystery is necessary to communicate salvation by grace. There can be no grace without a God who gives grace. In advocating mystery, I am not proposing a mysticism that degenerates into magic, nor a subjectivism lacking rational thought. Neither am I advocating a new-age

type spirituality. While mystery can be dangerous, it should not be avoided. The Christian safeguard against the degenerate uses of mystery is the focus on the person of Christ. My plea is that the church recover mystery in its worship through focusing on the mysterious presence of Christ.

The Absence of Mystery in the American Church

We saw in Chapter 4 that modernity causes a loss of the transcendent in a culture, the loss of mystery (Berger et al. 1973:82). This loss of transcendence suggests that humans are alone in the cosmos, or "homeless." Modernity also has a rationalizing effect on the worldview of a people, since technological production causes modern people to think in terms of components (Berger et al. 1973:27). Hunter (1983:100) has shown that spiritual experience in the evangelical church has largely become domesticated because of the rationalization of spirituality. Wagley (1990:4) and Hauerwas and Willimon (1989:116) suggest that mystery is a missing element in the mainline churches as well. It appears that the absence of mystery in the American worldview has created an absence of mystery in the American church. In the absence of mystery, religion, if it exists at all, is of the human-effort or moralistic variety. In Chapter 4 I documented at length the American propensity to understand religion in terms of moralism (Marty 1984, Campolo 1985, Finke and Starke 1989, Neuhaus 1986). It is

therefore understandable that Americans have no trouble being both religious and secular (Ladd 1986). God is largely absent in American Christianity. While American religion retains theological language, the worldview assumption is that, for all practical purposes, there is no God.

Mystery Is Necessary for Salvation by Grace
to Be Apprehended

Our problem of communicating salvation by grace in American culture is therefore more fundamentally a problem of challenging American worldview with the reality of God. Without a God who gives grace there can be no grace. The task of communicating grace to the self-reliant American is not simply a matter of disseminating knowledge or correct doctrine. The failure to apprehend salvation by grace in the American mind is a worldview problem. Somehow the worldview assumption that humans are alone in the universe, what Berger calls "homelessness," must be challenged. Perhaps the most important factor in communicating salvation by grace to the self-reliant American, the individual made free by the Enlightenment, is the encounter of God through the church's worship. When self-reliant people experience mystery in worship God-reliance becomes plausible.

The need for mystery and the supernatural as a challenge to modernity and individualism is supported by missiologist Lesslie Newbigin:

It would seem to be proved beyond doubt that human beings cannot live in the rarified atmosphere of pure rationality as the post-Enlightenment world has understood rationality. There are needs of the human spirit which simply must be met. It seems that those religious bodies which have tried to accommodate as much as possible of the rationalism of the Enlightenment are those which are in decline, and that those which have maintained a strong emphasis on the supernatural dimension of religion have flourished. (1989:213)

Again, mystery is necessary for grace to be credible, because in the absence of mystery people have no one to turn to but themselves for salvation. In the absence of mystery, religion inevitably becomes moralism. Without mystery there is no alternative to human-effort religion.

The reader will recall the importance of mystery in Alcoholics Anonymous. The alcoholic must acknowledge that she or he is out of control (Step One), and believe in God as she or he understands him (Step Two). The shift from self-reliance to God-reliance is basic to A.A. Without mystery God-reliance is not a credible alternative.

The Recovery of Mystery in American Christianity

The question of how to recover mystery in American Christianity is problematic, since "how" questions by definition remove mystery. Mystery is lost as soon as it is explained. Nor can mystery be created nor manipulated.

However, I am going to suggest some guidelines for the "how" questions of mystery. This may seem strange to the

reader, since this dissertation is an attack on human-effort religion. Is not any discussion of method in mystery an attempt to replace God with human effort? The answer is no. While mystery cannot be created, an atmosphere can be created where mystery is more likely to occur. Methods are necessary but must not be confused with mystery. In Richard Foster's discussion of the spiritual disciplines he writes, "We must always remember that the path [methods] does not produce the change; it only puts us in the place where the change can occur" (1978:7).

Additionally, a discussion of method for mystery is appropriate because "the separation of method from content is not only artificial but unfruitful" (Craddock 1974:53). My concern for the recovery of mystery in the church's worship is not therefore a plea for no method or human activity, but for the right methods. I contend that the methods often employed in North American worship communicate the human rather than the divine, self-reliance rather than grace. In a do-it-yourself society the temptation to produce a do-it-yourself religion is powerful.

The question of method is an important one for understanding missiology. Missiological research aims at understanding the way the gospel is communicated in a culture (especially across cultures), the way the church worships, and the way the church grows. It is a discipline with a focus on method. Its critics contend that, to use

Craddock's terminology, "method" replaces "content" in missiology, or that knowledge gained from behavioral science research replaces the work of the Holy Spirit. In reality, missiologists recognize with Craddock that method cannot be separated from content. How the gospel is perceived depends on how it is communicated. When it is communicated well the method will not replace the content but be consistent with it and present it in a way in which it can be understood and received. Missiologists also recognize that the knowledge of methods can be abused. There is a fine line between participating with God in ministry to people and manipulating people on God's behalf.

I have five suggestions for recovering mystery in the church through Christ's presence in worship. Mystery is recovered through sacrament, Scripture, song, silence, and signs and wonders.

Sacrament. Perhaps more than any other Christian practice, the celebration of the Eucharist points to the reality of God. In this sacrament Christ is mysteriously present in the bread and the wine. The Eucharist is not only a memorial of the Lord's death; it is also a celebration of Christ who lives and is mysteriously present with believers when they eat his flesh and drink his blood.

The Eucharist is also a celebration of the coming kingdom of God. God's kingdom is already present where believers from every strata of society unite around the

Lord's table. When Christians celebrate the Eucharist, the future is mysteriously present. While Paul writes of an abuse of the Eucharist, it is clear from I Corinthians 11:18-22 that slaves and masters were united around the Lord's table. It is sheer mystery that "because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (I Corinthians 10:17).

We noted in Chapter 4 the move of some evangelicals into the liturgical church in search of mystery (Webber 1985). I believe a renewed appreciation for the Eucharist in evangelical churches would help to recover the mystery presently absent in their rationalized religion.

Scripture. Scripture reading in worship points to God not only by its content (it is God's word) but by praying that God the Holy Spirit will illuminate the Scripture read to human minds. The prayer for illumination is a prayer that the same Spirit who inspired the word when it was written will inspire it again to those who hear it.

In the same way, preaching from the Scriptures is not simply hearing what the pastor has prepared as the weekly sermon but an exercise in which God speaks through the messenger. A beautiful example of the presence of Christ in preaching is the story of Peter and Cornelius: "So now all of us are here in the presence of God to listen to all that the Lord has commanded you to say" (Acts 10:33).

Preaching from Scripture should be in partnership with

the Holy Spirit and not simply an exercise in Christian education. When the worship service becomes a classroom lecture it is evidence of the rationalizing of religion--of modernity's encroachment on the church. Of course Christian education is vital in every church and the classroom lecture is an appropriate method for education. It is not an appropriate method for preaching the Scriptures, since preaching is more than education--it is a divine encounter.

Song. We have noted earlier the observation that worship may be becoming entertainment in some churches (Wagley 1990). Without question the method most susceptible to entertainment in Christian worship is music. For myself, I sense the presence of Christ in worship more through songs that address him than in songs that refer to him in the third person. Songs become hymns when they are prayers, and prayer implies that someone is present and listening. Testimony songs contribute to the life of the church, but as a method for creating an atmosphere in which Christ can be experienced through worship, they are not as suitable as music addressed to Christ.

I grew up in a denomination which could not "have church" without a song leader. I presently worship in congregations where the organ leads. I have found the latter practice more conducive to worship, since it is easy for the song leader's personality or concern with tempo to

distract from the encounter with God. However, when the song leader understands his or her role in the divine encounter, worship is often enhanced. In that case the song leader participates with God instead of manipulating the congregation, or getting them ready for the sermon.

Silence. Silence has long been a part of the Quaker tradition. Henri Nouwen (1981:59) writes that silence in the worship service usually provokes anxiety.

As soon as a minister says during a worship service, "Let us be silent for a few moments," people tend to become restless and preoccupied with only one thought: "When will this silence be over?" (1981:59).

However, Nouwen believes that silence can lead to an encounter with God.

Calling people together . . . means calling them away from the fragmenting and distracting wordiness of the dark world to that silence in which they can discover themselves, each other, and God. (1981:64)

It is surely true that silence is sometimes more profound than speech. Words can at times detract from the encounter with Christ's presence rather than enhance it. Sometimes an encounter between the human and the divine requires one to "be still, and know that I am God!" (Psalm 46:10).

Signs and wonders. Miracles are a sign of the presence of Christ. Since our post-Enlightenment worldview has no place for God or mystery, it has no place for miracles either. However, where the American worldview is being

challenged there are reports of signs and wonders in the American church. The church called The Vineyard Christian Fellowship (Kraft 1989) is God-centered and full of mystery, which is evident from its emphasis on worship and divine healing (Wimber 1983:13-16). It is not coincidental that the church's leading pastor, John Wimber, was exposed to what he calls "the crucial issue of 'worldview'" by Fuller Theological Seminary anthropologists Paul Heibert and Charles Kraft (Wimber 1983:15). Wimber's own Western worldview assumptions were also challenged by Third World Christians at the School of World Mission at Fuller Theological Seminary. The significance of the influence of these Third World Christians on Wimber is evident in his remark to Peter Wagner, church growth scholar at the seminary, "I'd like to prove whether or not what these Third World people are saying is viable in the U.S." (cited in Walker et al. 1983:6). It may not be too much to say that the Vineyard Christian Fellowship is a gift to the American Church from the Third World Church.

We have noted that the absence of mystery in the American church is a worldview problem, and that worldview is changed by experience. It may be that the best hope for recovering mystery (and thereby, salvation by grace) in the American church is exposure to the church of the Third World. When Bishop Abel Muzorewa of Zimbabwe attempted to explain the rapid growth of Christianity on the African

continent to an American congregation he said, "In Africa, we still believe that Jesus is alive!" (Muzorewa 1990).

Conclusion

We have seen that salvation by grace is difficult to apprehend in American culture due to the worldview theme of self-reliant individualism. I have suggested that the church challenge this worldview theme by preaching grace as opposed to self-reliance or human effort as the basis of the Christian community, by demonstrating community, and by celebrating mystery or a sense of the presence of Christ in worship.

The task of communicating grace is enormous. Even where these suggestions are being followed the church must resist the modern temptation to make relationships matters of personal choice. Christian communities in which grace is apprehended may be as difficult to maintain as they are to establish.

Nevertheless, I am optimistic about the future of the American church. For all its weaknesses, it is indwelt by the spirit of Christ. He is always doing something new, breaking in on the church in ways full of surprise. One pastor tells of how a street person came to faith in his well-to-do church. "That did something for all of us," the

pastor said. I expect such gifts to be repeated, because God is a God who gives.

Three questions have emerged from this dissertation which could be answered by further research.

First, we have seen that North Americans have difficulty understanding salvation by grace because their worldview assumptions are almost antithetical to God-reliance. The relative ease or difficulty of apprehending salvation by grace needs to be tested in less individualistic societies. Is grace more difficult to apprehend in American culture, or do all people have relatively the same difficulty apprehending grace?

Second, the relative difficulty of Americans to apprehend grace needs to be tested by gender. We have noted that women are more relational than men (Gilligan 1982:169). The American male does seem to value independence and self-reliance more than women. Are women more open to salvation by grace than men? Research using the same instruments employed in this research on a larger population would make it possible to test for correlations between gender and the understanding of salvation by grace. Men may indeed be more individualistic and more moralistic in their understanding of Christianity than women.

Third, the field research in this study tested the hypotheses on a homogeneous group. Paul's use of salvation by grace may suggest that grace is more powerfully

apprehended in groups that are diverse at several points. Two groups could be tested, one being homogeneous and the other being diverse in class, culture, and the age of the participants. Would there be a greater increase in the understanding of salvation by grace in the diverse community than in the homogeneous one?

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